The WILD GEESE

STANLEY WEYMAN

BC

PZ 3 .W547 Wi
Weyman, Stanley John, 1855-1928.
The wild geese

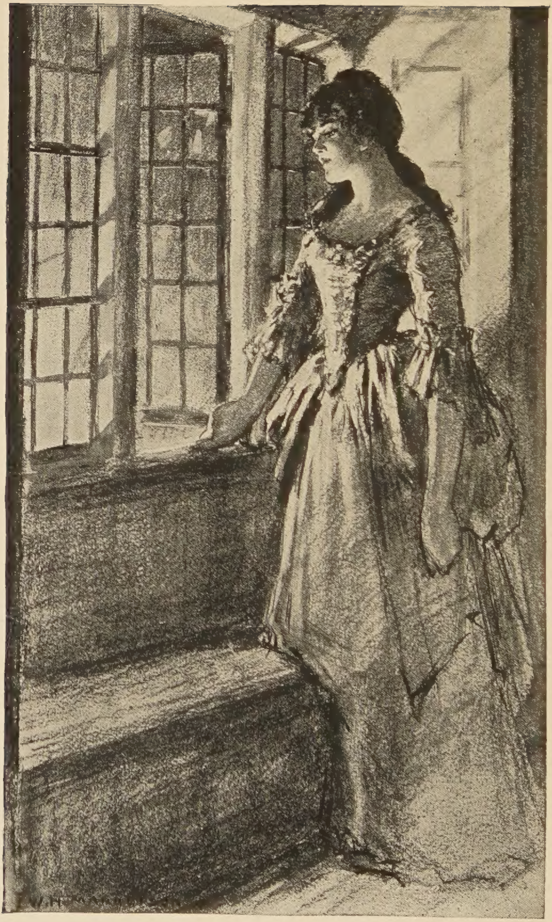
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_Y0-BCE-099

THE WILD GEESE

OTHER BOOKS BY STANLEY J. WEYMAN

- The House of the Wolf
- The New Rector
- The Story of Francis Cludde
- A Gentleman of France
- Under the Red Robe
- My Lady Rotha
- Memoirs of a Minister of France
- The Red Cockade
- The Man in Black
- Shrewsbury
- The Castle Inn
- Sophia
- Count Hannibal
- In Kings' Byways
- The Long Night
- The Abbess of Vlaye
- Starvecrow Farm



"SO THE STRUGGLE DEPICTED ITSELF TO MORE THAN ONE"

THE WILD GEESE

BY

STANLEY J. WEYMAN

Illustrated by W. H. Margetson

New York
Doubleday, Page & Company
1909

3
.W547
Wi

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THAT OF TRANSLATION
INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGES, INCLUDING THE SCANDINAVIAN

COPYRIGHT, 1908, 1909, BY STANLEY J. WEYMAN

PUBLISHED, FEBRUARY, 1909

CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE
I. On Board the "Cormorant" Sloop . 3
II. Morristown 16
III. A Scion of Kings 26
IV. "Stop Thief!" 39
V. The Mess-room at Tralee . . . 53
VI. The Maître d'Armes 66
VII. Bargaining 81
VIII. An After-dinner Game . . . 92
IX. Early Risers 105
X. A Council of War 119
XI. A Message for the Young Master . 134
XII. The Sea Mist 148
XIII. A Slip 162
XIV. The Colonel's Terms 174
XV. Femina Furens 188
XVI. The Marplot 202
XVII. The Limit 215
XVIII. A Counterplot 230
XIX. Peine Forte et Dure 244

CHAPTER PAGE
XX. An Unwelcome Visitor . . . 257
XXI. The Key 273
XXII. The Scene in the Passage . . . 286
XXIII. Behind the Yews 297
XXIV. The Pitcher at the Well . . . 312
XXV. Peace 320

ILLUSTRATIONS

"So the Struggle Depicted Itself to More Than One!" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

PAGE

"'Who Loves Me, Follows Me!—Across the Water'" 102

"Then, with a Queer Sobbing Sound, She Fainted" 170

"She Lunged with all the Force of Her Strong Young Arm" 194

THE WILD GEESE

CHAPTER I

ON BOARD THE "CORMORANT" SLOOP

MIDWAY in that period of Ireland's history during which, according to historians, the distressful country had none—to be more precise, on a spring morning early in the eighteenth century, and the reign of George the First, a sloop of about seventy tons' burthen was beating up Dingle Bay, in the teeth of a stiff easterly breeze. The sun was two hours high, and the gray expanse of the bay was flecked with white horses hurrying seaward in haste to leap upon the Blasquets, or to disport themselves in the field of ocean. From the heaving deck of the vessel the mountains that shall not be removed were visible — on the northerly tack Brandon, on the southerly Carntual; the former sunlit, with patches of moss gleaming like emeralds on its breast, the latter dark and melancholy, clothed in the midst of tradition and fancy that in those days garbed so much of Ireland's bog and hill.

The sloop had missed the tide, and, close hauled to the wind, rode deep in the ebb, making little way with each tack. The breeze hummed through the rigging. The man at the helm humped a shoulder to the sting of the spray, and the rest of the crew, seven or eight in number — tarry, pigtailed, outlandish sailor men — crouched under the windward rail. The skipper sat with a companion on a coil of rope on the dry side of the skylight, oblivious alike of the weather and his difficulties, his eyes fixed on his neighbour, in wondering, fatuous admiration.

"Never?" he murmured respectfully.

"Never," his companion answered.

"My faith!" Captain Augustin rejoined. He was a cross between a Frenchman and an Irishman. For twenty years he had carried wine to Ireland, and returned laden with wool to Bordeaux or Cadiz. He knew every inlet between Achill Sound and the Head of Kinsale, and was so far a Jacobite that he scorned to pay duty to King George. "Never? My faith!" he repeated, staring, if possible, harder than ever.

"No," said the Colonel. "Under no provocation, thank God!"

"But it 's *drole*," Captain Augustin rejoined. "It would bother me sorely to know what you do."

"What we all should do," his passenger answered gently. "Our duty, Captain Augustin. Doing which, we have no more to fear, no more to question."

"But west of Shannon, where there is no law?" Augustin answered. "And in Kerry — where we 'll be, the saints helping, before noon — what with Sullivans, and Mahonies, and O'Beirnes, that wear coats only for a gentleman to tread upon, and would sooner shoot a friend before breakfast than spend the day idle, *par* *ma foi*, I 'm not seeing what you 'll be doing there, Colonel."

"A man may protect himself from violence," the Colonel answered soberly, "and yet do his duty. What he may not do — is this: He may not go out to kill another in cold blood, for a point of honour, or for revenge, or to sustain what he has already done amiss! I hope I make myself clear, Captain Augustin?" he added courteously.

He asked because the skipper's face of wonderment was not to be misread. And the skipper answered, "Quite clear!" meaning the reverse. Clear, indeed? Yonder were the hills and bogs of Kerry — lawless, impenetrable, abominable — a realm of Tories. On the sloop itself was scarce a man whose hands were free from blood. He, Augustin, mild-mannered as any smuggler on the coast, had spent his life between fleeing and fighting, with his four carronades ever crammed to the muzzle, and his cargo ready to be jettisoned at sight of a cruiser. And this man talked as if he were in church!

Captain Augustin cast a wild eye at the straining, shrieking rigging; the sloop was lurching heavily. But whether he would or no, his eye fluttered back and rested, fascinated, on the Colonel's face. Indeed, from the hour, ten days earlier, which had seen him mount the side in the Bordeaux river, Colonel John Sullivan had been a subject of growing astonishment to the skipper. Captain Augustin knew his world tolerably. In his time he had conveyed many a strange passenger from strand to strand, had talked with them, learned their secrets, and more often their hopes.

But such a man as this he had never carried. A man who had seen outlandish service; but who neither swore, nor drank above measure, nor swaggered, nor threatened. Who would not dice, nor game — save for trifles. Who, on the contrary, talked of duty, had a peaceful word for all, openly condemned the duello, and was mild as milk and as gentle as an owl. Such a one seemed the fabled "phaynix," or a bat with six wings, or any other prodigy which the fancy, Irish or foreign, could conceive.

Then, to double the marvel, the Colonel had a servant, a close-tongued fellow, William Bale by name, reputed an Englishman, who, if he was not like his master, was as unlike other folk. He was as quiet-spoken as the Colonel, as precise, and as peaceable. He had even been heard to talk of his duty. But while the Colonel was tall and spare, with a gentle eye and a long, kindly face, and was altogether of a pensive cast, Bale was short and stout, of a black pallor, and very forbidding, His mouth, when he opened it — which was seldom — dropped honey. But his brow scowled, his lip sneered, and his silence invited no confidence.

Such being the skipper's passenger, and such his man, the wonder was that Captain Augustin's astonishment had not long ago melted into contempt. But it had not. For one thing, a seaman had been hurt, and the Colonel had exhibited a skill in the treatment of wounds which would not have disgraced an experienced chirurgeon. Then in the bay the sloop had met with half a gale, and the passenger, in circumstances which the skipper knew to be more trying to landsmen than to himself, had maintained a serenity beyond applause. He had even, clinging to the same ring-bolt with the skipper, while the south-wester tore overhead and the gallant little vessel lay over wellnigh to her beam-ends, praised the conduct of the crew.

"This is the finest thing in the world," he had shouted, amid the roar of things, "to see men doing their duty! I would not have missed this for a hundred crowns!"

"I 'd give as much to be safe in Cherbourg," had been the skipper's grim reply as he watched his mast.

But Augustin had not forgotten the Colonel's coolness. A landsman, for whom the trough of the wave had no terrors, was not a man to be despised.

Indeed, from that time the skipper had begun to find a charm in the Colonel's gentleness and courtesy. He had fought against the feeling, but it had grown upon him. Something that was almost affection began to mingle with and augment his wonder. Hence the patience with which, with Kerry on the beam, he listened while the Colonel sang his siren song.

"He will be one of the people called Quakers," the skipper thought, after a while. "I 've heard of them, but never seen one."

Unfortunately, as he arrived at his conclusion, a cry from the steersman roused him. He sprang to his feet.

Alas! the sloop had run too far on the northerly tack, and simultaneously the wind had shifted a point to the southward. She had been allowed to run into a bight of the north shore and a line of foam cut her off to the eastward, leaving small room to tack. She might still clear the westerly rocks and run out to sea, but the skipper saw that this was doubtful, and with a seaman's quickness he made up his mind.

"Keep her on! — keep her on!" he roared. "Child of the accursed! We must run into Skull haven! And if the men of Skull take so much as an iron bolt from us, and I misdoubt them, I 'll keel-haul you! I 'll not leave an inch of skin upon you!"

The man, cowering over the wheel, obeyed, and the little vessel ran up the narrowing water — on an even keel. The crew were already on their feet, they had loosened the sheet, and squared the boom; they stood by to lower the yard. All — the skipper with a grim face — stood looking forward, as the inlet narrowed, the green banks closed in, the rocks that fringed them approached. Silently and gracefully the sloop glided on, until a turn in the passage opened a small land-locked haven. At the head of the haven, barely a hundred yards above high-water mark, stood a ruined tower — the Tower of Skull — and below this a long house of stone with a thatched roof.

It was clear that the sloop's movements had been watched from the shore, for although the melancholy waste of moor and mountain disclosed no other habitation, a score of half-naked, barefoot figures were gathered on the jetty; while others could be seen hurrying down the hillside. These cried to one another in an unknown tongue, with shrill voices, which vied with the screams of the gulls swinging overhead.

"Stand by to let go the kedge," Augustin cried, eyeing them gloomily. "We are too far in now! Let go! — let go!"

But the order and the ensuing action at once redoubled the clamour on shore. A dozen of the foremost natives flung themselves into crazy boats, with consummate skill and daring. When they were within hail, a man, wearing a long frieze coat, and a fisherman's red cap, stood up in the bow of the nearest.

"You will be coming to the jetty, Captain?" he cried in imperfect English.

The skipper scowled at him, but did not answer.

"You will come to the jetty, Captain," the man repeated in his high, sing-song voice. "Sure, and you 've come convenient, for there 's no one here barring yourselves."

"And you 're wanting brandy!" Augustin muttered bitterly under his breath. He glanced at his men as if he meditated resistance.

"Kerry law! Kerry law!" the man cried. "You know it well, Captain! It 's not I 'll be answerable if you don't come to the jetty."

The skipper, who had fared ill at Skull once before, knew that he was in the men's power. True, a single discharge of his carronades would blow the boats to pieces; but he could not in a moment warp his ship out through the narrow passage. And if he could, he knew that the act would be bloodily avenged if he ever landed again in that part of Ireland. He swore under his breath, and the steersman, who had wrought the harm by holding on too long, wilted under his eye.

At length he yielded, sulkily gave the order, the windlass was manned, and the kedge drawn up. Fenders were lowered, and the sloop slid gently to the jetty side.

In a twinkling a score of natives swarmed aboard. The man in the frieze coat followed more leisurely, and with such dignity as became the owner of a stone-walled house. He sauntered up to the skipper, a leer in his eye.

"You will have lost something the last time you were here, Captain?" he said. "It is not I that will be responsible this time unless the stuff is landed."

Augustin laughed scornfully. "The cargo is for Crosby of Castlemaine," he said. And he added various things which he hoped would happen to himself if he landed so much as a single tub.

"It 's little we know of Crosby here," the other replied; and he spat on the deck. "And less we 'll be caring, my dear. I say it shall be landed. Here, you, Darby Sullivan, off with the hatch!"

Augustin stepped forward impulsively, as if he had a mind to throw the gentleman in the frieze coat into the sea. But he had not armed himself before he came on deck, the men of Skull outnumbered his crew two to one, and, though savage and half-naked, were furnished to a man with long, sharp skenes. If resistance had been possible at any time, he had let the moment pass. The nearest justice lived twelve Irish miles away, and had he been on the spot he would, since he was of necessity a Protestant, have been helpless — unless he brought the garrison of Tralee at his back. The skipper hesitated, and while he hesitated the hatches were off, and the Sullivans swarmed down like monkeys. Before the sloop could be made fast, the smaller kegs were being tossed up, and passed over the side, a line was formed on land, and the cargo, which had last seen the sun on the banks of the Garonne, was swiftly vanishing in the maw of the stone house on the shore

The skipper's rage was great, but he could only swear, and O'Sullivan Og, the man in the frieze coat, who bore him an old grudge, grinned in mockery. "For better custody, Captain!" he said. "Under my roof, *bien!* And when you will to go again there will be the dues to be paid, the little dues over which we quarrelled last time! And all will be rendered to a stave!"

"You villain!" the Captain muttered under his breath. "I understand!" Turning — for the sight was more than he could bear — he found his passenger at his elbow.

The Colonel liked the proceedings almost as little as the skipper. His lips were tightly closed, and he frowned.

"Ay," Augustin cried bitterly — for the first instinct of the man who is hurt is to hurt another — "now you see what it is you 've come back to! It 's rob, or be robbed, this side of Tralee. I wish you well out of it! But I suppose it would take more than this to make you draw that long hanger of yours?"

The Colonel cast a troubled eye on him. "Beyond doubt," he said, "it is the duty of a man to assist in defending the house of his host. And in a sense and measure, the goods of his host" — with an uneasy look at the fast-vanishing cargo, which was leaping from hand to hand so swiftly that the progress of a tub from the hold to the house was as the flight of a swallow — "are the house of his host. I do not deny that," he continued precisely, "but ——"

"But in this instance," the sea-captain struck in with a sneer, contempt for the first time mastering wonder.

"In this instance," the Colonel repeated with an unmistakable blush, "I am not free to act. The truth is, Captain Augustin, these folk are of my kin. I was born not many miles from here" — his eye measured the lonely landscape as if he compared it with more recent scenes — "and, wrong or right, blood is thicker than wine. So that, frankly, I am not clear that for the sake of your Bordeaux, I 'm tied to shed blood that might be my forbears'!"

"Or your grandmother's," Augustin cried, with an open sneer.

"Or my grandmother's. Very true. But if a word to them in season ——"

"Oh, hang your words," the skipper retorted disdainfully.

He would have said more, but at that moment it became clear that something was happening on shore. On the green brow beside the tower a girl mounted on horseback had appeared; at a cry from her the men had stopped work. The next moment her horse came cantering down the slope, and with uplifted whip she rode in among the men. The whip fell twice, and down went all the tubs within reach. Her voice, speaking, now Erse, now Kerry English, could be heard upbraiding the nearest. Then on the brow behind her appeared a man who looked gigantic against the sky, and who sat a horse to match. He descended more slowly, and reached the girl's side as O'Sullivan Og, in his frieze coat, came to the front in support of his men.

For a full minute the girl vented her anger on Og, while he stood sulky but patient, waiting for an opening to defend himself. When he obtained this, he seemed to the two on the deck of the sloop to appeal to the big man, who said a word or two, but was cut short by the girl. Her voice, passionate and indignant, reached the deck, but not her words.

"That should be Flavia McMurrough!" the Colonel murmured thoughtfully, "and Uncle Ulick. He 's little changed, whoever 's changed! She has a will, it seems, and good impulses!"

The big man had begun by frowning on O'Sullivan Og. But presently he smiled at something the latter said, then he laughed; at last he made a joke himself. The girl turned on him; but he argued with her. A man held up a tub for inspection, and though she struck it pettishly with her whip, it was plain that she was shaken. O'Sullivan Og pointed to the sloop, pointed to his house, grinned. The listeners on the deck caught the word "Dues!" and the peal of laughter that followed.

Captain Augustin understood naught of what was going forward. But the man beside him, who did, touched his sleeve. "It were well to speak to her," he said.

"Who is she?" the skipper asked impatiently. "What has she to do with it?"

"They are her people," the Colonel answered simply — "or they should be. If she says yea, it is yea; and if she says nay, it is nay. Or, so it should be — as far as a league beyond Morristown."

Augustin waited for no more. He was still in a fog, but he saw a ray of hope; this was the chatelaine, it seemed. He bundled over the side.

Alas! he ventured too late. As his feet touched the slippery stones of the jetty, the girl wheeled her horse about with an angry exclamation, shook her whip at O'Sullivan Og — who winked the moment her back was turned — and cantered away up the hill. On the instant the men picked up the kegs they had dropped, a shrill cry passed down the line, and the work was resumed.

But the big man remained; and the skipper, with the Colonel at his elbow, made for him through the half-naked kernes. He saw them coming, however, guessed their errand, and, with the plain intention of avoiding them, he turned his horse's head.

The King's Library

But the skipper, springing forward, was in time to seize his stirrup. "Sir," he cried, "this is robbery! *Nom de Dieu,* it is thievery!"

The big man looked down at him with temper. "Oh, by heaven, you must pay your dues!" he said. "Oh yes, you must pay your dues!"

"But this is robbery."

"Sure it 's not that you must be saying!"

The Colonel put the skipper on one side. "By your leave," he cried, "one word! You don't know, sir, who I am, but ——"

"I know you must pay your dues!" Uncle Ulick answered, parrot-like. "Oh yes, you must pay your dues!" He was clearly ashamed of his *role,* for he shook off the Colonel's hold with a pettish gesture, struck his horse with his stick, and cantered away over the hill.

"*Vaurien!*" cried Captain Augustin, shaking his fist after him, but he might as well have sworn at the moon.

CHAPTER II

MORRISTOWN

IT WAS not until the Colonel had passed over the shoulder above the stone-walled house that he escaped from the jeers of the younger members of this savage tribe, who, noting something abnormal in the fashion of the stranger's clothes, followed him a space. On descending the farther slope, however, he found himself alone in the silence of the waste. Choosing without hesitation one of two tracks, ill-trodden, but such as in that district and at that period passed for roads, he took his way along it at a good pace.

A wide brown basin, bog for the most part, but rising here and there into low mounds of sward or clumps of thorn-trees, stretched away to the foot of the hills. The tower on the shoulder behind him had been raised by his wild forefathers. Soil and sky, the lark which sang overhead, the dark peat-water which rose under foot, the scent of the moist air, the cry of the curlew, all spoke of the home which he had left in the gaiety of youth, to return to it a grave man, older than his years, with gray hairs flecking the black. No wonder that he stood more than once, and, absorbed in thought, gazed on this or that, on crag and moss, on the things which time and experience had so strangely diminished.

The track, after zig-zagging across a segment of the basin, entered a narrow valley, drained by a tolerable stream. After ascending this for a couple of miles, it disclosed a view of a wider vale, enclosed by gentle hills. In the lap of this nestled a lake, on the upper end of which some beauty was conferred by a few masses of rock partly clothed by birch trees, through which a stream fell sharply from the upland. Not far from these rocks a long, low house stood on the shore.

The stranger paused to take in the prospect; nor was it until after the lapse of some minutes, spent in the deepest reverie, that he pursued his way along the left-hand bank of the lake. By-and-by he was able to discern, amid the masses of rock at the head of the lake, a gray tower, the twin of that Tower of Skull which he had left behind him; and a hundred paces farther he came upon a near view of the house.

"Two and twenty years!" he murmured. "There is not even a dog to bid me welcome!"

The house was of two stories, with a thatched roof. Its back was to the slopes that rose by marshy terraces to the hills. Its face was turned to the lake, and between it and the water lay a walled forecourt, the angle on each side of the entrance protected by a tower of an older date than the house. The entrance was somewhat pretentious, and might — for each of the pillars supported a heraldic beast — have seemed to an English eye out of character with the thatched roof. But one of the beasts was headless, and one of the gates had fallen from its hinges. In like manner the dignity of a tolerably spacious garden, laid out beside the house, was marred by the proximity of the fold-yard.

On the lower side of the road, opposite the gates, half a dozen stone steps, that like the heraldic pillars might have graced a more stately mansion, led down to the water. They formed a resting-place for as many beggars, engaged in drawing at empty pipes; while twice as many old women sat against the wall of the forecourt and, with their drugget cloaks about them, kept up a continual whine. Among these, turning herself now to one, now to another, moved the girl whom the Colonel had seen at the landing-place. She held her riding-skirt uplifted in one hand, her whip in the other, and she was bareheaded. At her elbow, whistling idly, and tapping his boots with a switch, lounged the big man of the morning.

As the Colonel approached, the man and the maid turned and looked at him. The two exchanged some sentences, and the man came forward to meet him.

"Sir," he said, not without a touch of rough courtesy, "if it is for hospitality you have come, you will be welcome at Morristown. But if it is to start a cry about this morning's business, you 've travelled on your ten toes to no purpose."

The Colonel looked at him. "Cousin Ulick," he said, "I take your welcome as it is meant, and I thank you for it."

The big man's mouth opened wide. "By the Holy Cross!" he said, "if I 'm not thinking it is John Sullivan!"

"It is," the Colonel answered, smiling. And he held out his hand.

Uncle Ulick grasped it impulsively. "And it 's I 'm the one that 's glad to see you," he said. "By heaven, I am! Though I did n't expect you! And faith, I 'm not sure that you will be as welcome to all, John Sullivan, as you are to me."

"You were always easy, Ulick," the other answered with a smile, "when you were big and I was little."

"Ay? Well, in size we 're much as we were. But — Flavia!"

The girl, scenting something strange, was already at his elbow. "What is it?" she asked, her breath coming a little quickly. "Who is it?" fixing her eyes on the newcomer's face.

Uncle Ulick chuckled. "It 's your guardian, my jewel," he said. "No less! And what he 'll say to what 's going on I 'll not be foretelling!"

"My guardian?" she repeated, the blood rising abruptly to her cheek.

"Just that," Ulick Sullivan answered. "It 's John Sullivan back from Sweden, and as I 've told him, I 'm not sure that all at Morristown will be as glad to see him as I am." Uncle Ulick went off into a peal of Titanic laughter.

But that which amused him did not appear to amuse his niece. She stood staring at Colonel Sullivan as if she were far more surprised than pleased. At length, and with a childish dignity, she held out her hand.

"If you are Colonel John Sullivan," she said, in a thin voice, "you are welcome at Morristown."

He might have laughed at the distance of her tone, but he merely bowed, and with the utmost gravity. "I thank you," he answered. And then, addressing Ulick Sullivan, "I need not say that I had your communication," he continued, "with the news of Sir Michael's death and of the dispositions made by his will. I could not come at once, but when I could I did, and I am here. Having said so much," he went on, turning to the girl with serious kindness, "may I add that I think it will be well if we leave matters of business on one side until we know one another?"

"Well, faith, I think we 'd better," Ulick Sullivan chuckled. "I do think so, bedad!"

The girl said nothing, and restraint fell upon the three. They turned from one another and looked across the lake, which the wind, brisk at sea, barely ruffled. Colonel Sullivan remarked that they had a little more land under tillage than he remembered, and Ulick Sullivan assented. Again there was silence, until the girl struck her habit with her whip and cried flippantly, "Well, to dinner, if we are to have dinner!" She turned, and led the way to the gate of the forecourt.

The man who followed was clever enough to read defiance in the pose of her head and resentment in her shoulders. When a beggar-woman, more importunate than the rest, caught hold of her skirt, and Flavia flicked her with her whip as she would have flicked a dog, he understood.

There were dogs in the stone-paved hall; a hen, too, finding its food on the floor and strutting here and there as if it had never known another home. On the left of the door, an oak table stood laid for the midday meal; on the right, before a carved stone chimney-piece, under which a huge log smouldered on the andirons, two or three men were seated. These rose on the entrance of the young mistress — they were dependents of the better class, for whom open house was kept at Morristown. So far, all was well; yet it may be that on the instant eyes which had been blind to defects were opened by the presence of this stranger from the outer world. Flavia's voice was hard as she asked old Darby, the butler, if The McMurrough was in the house.

"Faith, I believe not," said he. "His Honour, nor the other quality, have not returned from the fishing."

"Well, let him know when he comes in," she rejoined, "that Colonel John Sullivan has arrived from Sweden, and," she added with a faint sneer, "it were well if you put on your uniform coat, Darby."

The old butler did not hear the last words. He was looking at the newcomer. "Glory be, Colonel," he said; "it 's in a field of peas I 'd have known you! True for you, you 're as like the father that bred you as the two covers of a book! It 's he was the grand gentleman!

I was beyant the Mahoney's great gravestone when he shot Squire Crosby in the old churchyard of Tralee for an appetite to his breakfast! More by token, he went out with the garrison officer after his second bottle that same day that ever was — and the creature shot him in the knee — bad luck to him for a foreigner and a Protestant — and he limped to his dying day!"

The girl laughed unkindly. "You 're opening your mouth and putting your foot in it, Darby," she said. "If the Colonel is not a foreigner ——"

"And sure he could n't be that, and his own father's son!" cried the quick-witted Irishman. "And if, bad luck, he 's a Protestant, I 'll never believe he 's one of them through-and-through black Protestants that you and I mean! Glory be, it 's not in the Sullivans to be one of them!"

The Colonel laughed as he shook the old servant's hand, and Uncle Ulick joined in the laugh. "You 're a clever rogue, Darby," he said. "Your neck 'll never be in a rope, but your fingers will untie the knot! And now, where 'll you put him?"

Flavia tapped her foot on the floor; foreseeing, perhaps, what was coming.

"Put his honour?" Darby repeated, rubbing his bald head. "Ay, sure, where 'll we put him? May it be long before the heavens is his bed! There 's the old master's room, a grand chamber fit for a lord, but there 's a small matter of the floor that is sunk and lets in the rats — bad cess to the dogs for an idle, useless pack.

The young master's friends are in the south, but the small room beyant that has the camp truckle that Sir Michael brought from the ould wars: that 's dry and snug! And for the one window that 's airy, sure, 't is no drawback at this sayson."

"It will do very well for me, Darby," the Colonel said, smiling.

"Well," Darby answered, "I 'm not so sure where 's another. The young masther ——"

"That will do, Darby!" the girl cried impatiently. And then, "I am sorry, Colonel Sullivan," she continued stiffly, "that you should be so poorly lodged — who are the master of all. But doubtless," with an irrepressible resentment in her voice, "you will be able presently to put matters on a better footing."

With a formal curtsey she retreated up the stairs, which at the rear of the hall ascended to a gallery that ran right and left to the rooms on the first floor.

Colonel Sullivan turned with Uncle Ulick to the nearest window and looked out on the untidy forecourt. "You know, I suppose," he said, in a tone which the men beside the fire, who were regarding him curiously, could not hear, "the gist of Sir Michael's letters to me?"

Uncle Ulick drummed with his fingers on the window-sill. "Faith, the most of it," he said.

"Was he right in believing that her brother intended to turn Protestant for the reasons he told me?"

"It 's like enough, I 'm thinking."

"Does she know? The girl?"

"Not a breath! And I would not be the one to tell her," Uncle Ulick added, with some grimness.

"Yet it may be necessary?"

Uncle Ulick shook his fist at a particularly importunate beggar who had ventured across the forecourt. "It 's a gift the little people never gave me to tell unpleasant things," he said. "And if you 'll be told by me, Colonel, you 'll travel easy. The girl has a spirit, and you 'll not persuade her to stand in her brother's light, at all, at all! She has it fast that her grandfather wronged him — and old Sir Michael was queer-tempered at times. The gift to her will go for nothing, you 'll see!"

"She must be a noble girl."

"Never a better!"

"But if her grandfather was right in thinking so ill of his grandson?"

"I 'm not saying he was n't," Uncle Ulick muttered.

"Then we must not let her set the will aside."

Ulick Sullivan shrugged his shoulders. "Let?" he said. "Faith! it 's but little it 'll be a question of that! James is for taking, and she 's for giving! He 's her white swan. Who 's to hinder?"

"You."

"It 's easiness has been my ruin, and faith! it 's too late to change."

"Then I?"

Uncle Ulick smiled. "To be sure," he said slily, "there 's you, Colonel."

"The whole estate is mine, you see, in law."

"Ay, but there 's no law west of Tralee," Uncle Ulick retorted. "That 's where old Sir Michael made his mistake. I 'd not be knowing what would happen if it went about that you were ousting them that had the right, and you a Protestant. He 's not the great favourite, James McMurrough, and whether he or the girl took most 'd be a mighty small matter. But if you think to twist it, so as to play cuckoo — though with the height of fair meaning and not spying a silver penny of profit for yourself, Colonel — I take leave to tell you he 's a most unpopular bird."

"But, Sir Michael," the Colonel answered, "left all to me to that very end — that it might be secured to the girl."

"Sorrow one of me says no!" Ulick rejoined. "But——"

"But what?" the Colonel replied politely. "The more plainly you speak the more you will oblige me."

But all that Ulick Sullivan could be brought to say at that moment — perhaps he knew that curious eyes were on their conference — was that Kerry was "a mighty queer country," and the thief of the world would n't know what would pass there by times. And besides, there were things afoot that he 'd talk about at another time.

Then he changed the subject abruptly, asking the Colonel if he had seen a big ship in the bay.

"What colours?" the Colonel asked — the question men ask who have been at sea.

"Spanish, maybe," Uncle Ulick answered "Did you sight such a one?"

But the Colonel had seen no big ship.

CHAPTER III

A SCION OF KINGS

THE family at Morristown had been half an hour at table, and in the interval a man of more hasty judgment than Colonel Sullivan might have made up his mind on many points. Whether the young McMurrough was offensive of set purpose, and because an unwelcome guest was present, or whether he merely showed himself as he was — an unlicked cub — such a man might have determined. But the Colonel held his judgment in suspense, though he leaned to the latter view of the case.

At their first sitting down the young man had shown his churlishness. Beginning by viewing the Colonel in sulky silence, he had answered his kinsmen's overtures only by a rude stare or a boorish word. His companions, two squireens of his own age, and much of his own kidney, nudged him from time to time, and then the three would laugh in such a way as to make it plain that the stranger was the butt of the jest. Presently, overcoming the reluctant impression which Colonel John's manners made upon him, the young man found his tongue, and, glancing at his companions to bring them into the joke, "Much to have where you come from, Colonel?" he asked.

"As in most places," the Colonel replied mildly, "by working for it, or earning it after one fashion or another. Indeed, my friend, country and country are more alike, except on the outside, than is thought by those who stay at home."

"You 've seen a wealth of countries, I 'm thinking?" the youth asked with a sneer.

"I have crossed Europe more than once."

"And stayed in none?"

"If you mean ——"

"Faith, I mean you 've come back!" the young man exclaimed with a loud laugh, in which his companions joined. "You 'll mind the song" — and with a wink he trolled out,

"In such contempt, in short, I fell
Which was a very hard thing,
They devilish badly used me there,
For nothing but a farthing.

"You 're better than that, Colonel, for the worst we can say of you is, you 's come back a penny!"

"If you mean a bad one, come home," the Colonel rejoined, taking the lad good-humouredly — he was not blind to the flush of indignation which dyed Flavia's cheeks — "I 'll take the wit for welcome. To be sure, to die in Ireland is an Irishman's hope, all the world over."

"True for you, Colonel!" Uncle Ulick said. And "For shame, James," he continued, speaking with more sternness than was natural to him. "Faith, and if you talked abroad as you talk at home, you 'd be for having a pistol-ball in your gizzard in the time it takes you to say your prayers — if you ever say them, my lad!"

"What are my prayers to you, I 'd like to know?" James retorted offensively.

"Easy, lad, easy!"

The young man glared at him. "What is it to you," he cried still more rudely, "whether I pray or no?"

"James! James!" Flavia pleaded under her breath.

"Do you be keeping your feet to yourself!" he cried, betraying her kindly manœuvre. "And let my shins be! I want none of your guiding! More by token, miss, don't you be making a sight of yourself as you did this morning, or you 'll smart for it. What is it to you if O'Sullivan Og takes our dues for us — and a trifle over? And, sorra one of you doubt it, if Mounseer comes jawing here, it 's in the peathole he 'll find himself! Never the value of a cork he gets out of me: that 's flat! Eh, Phelim?"

"True for you, McMurrough!" the youth who sat beside him answered, winking. "We 'll soak him for you."

"So do you be taking a lesson, Miss Flavvy," the young Hector continued, "and don't you go threatening honest folk with your whip, or it 'll be about your own shoulders it 'll fall! I know what 's going on, and when I want your help, I 'll ask it."

The girl's lip trembled. "But it 's robbery, James," she murmured.

"Hang your robbery!" he retorted, casting a defiant eye round the table. "They 'll pay our dues, and what they get back will be their own!"

"And it 's rich they 'll be with it!" Phelim chuckled.

"Ay, faith, it 's the proud men they 'll be that day!" laughed Morty, his brother.

"Fine words, my lad," Uncle Ulick replied quietly; "but it 's my opinion you 'll fall on trouble, and more than 'll please you, with Crosby of Castlemaine. And why, I 'd like to know? 'T is a grand trade, and has served us well since I can remember! Why can't you take what 's fair out of it, and let the poor devil of a sea-captain that 's supplied many an honest man's table have his own, and go his way? Take my word for it, it 's ruing it you 'll be, when all 's done.

"It 's not from Crosby of Castlemaine I 'll rue it!" James McMurrough answered arrogantly. "I 'll shoot him like a bog-snipe if he 's sorra a word to say to it! That for him, the black sneak of a Protestant!" And he snapped his fingers. "But his day will soon be past, and we 'll be dealing with him. The toast is warming for him now!"

Phelim slapped his thigh. "True for you, McMurrough! That 's the talk!"

"That 's the talk!" chorussed Morty.

The Colonel opened his mouth to speak, but he caught Flavia's look of distress, and he refrained.

"For my part," Morty continued jovially, "I 'd not wait — for you know what! The gentleman's way 's the better; early or late, Clare or Kerry, 't is all one! A drink of the tea, a peppered devil, and a pair of the beauties is an Irishman's morning!"

"And many 's the poor soul has to mourn it — long and bitterly," the Colonel said. His tender corn being trod upon, he could be silent no longer. "For shame, sir, for shame!" he added warmly.

Morty stared. "Begorra, and why?" he cried, in a tone which proved that he asked the question in perfect innocence.

"Why?" Colonel John repeated. For a moment, in face of prejudices so strong, he paused. "Can you ask me when you know how a many life as young as yours — and I take you to be scarcely, sir, in your twenties — has been forfeit for a thoughtless word, an unwitting touch, a look; when you know how many a bride has been widowed as soon as wedded, how many a babe orphaned as soon as born? And for what, sir?"

"For the point of honour!" The McMurrough cried. Morty, for his part, was dumb with astonishment.

"The point of honour?" the Colonel repeated, more slowly, "what is it? In nine cases out of ten the fear of seeming to be afraid. In the tenth — the desire to wipe out a stain that blood leaves as deep as before!"

"Faith, and you surprise me!" Phelim cried with a genuine *naïveté* that at another time would have provoked a smile.

"Kerry 'll more than surprise you," quoth The McMurrough rudely, "if it 's that way you 'll be acting! Would you let Crosby of Castlemaine call you thief?"

"I would not thieve!" the Colonel replied.

There was a stricken silence for a moment. Then The

McMurrough sprang to his feet, his querulous face flushed with rage, his arm raised. But Ulick's huge hand dragged him down. "Easy, lad, easy," he cried, restraining the young man. "He 's your guest; remember that!"

"And he spoke in haste," the Colonel said. "I withdraw my words," he continued, rising and frankly holding out his hand. "I recognize that I was wrong. I see that the act bears in your eyes a different aspect, and I beg your pardon, sir."

The McMurrough took the hand, though he took it sullenly; and the Colonel sat down again. His action, to say nothing of his words, left Phelim and Morty in a state of amazement so profound that the two sat staring as if carved out of the same block of wood.

If Colonel John noticed their surprise he seemed in no way put out by it. "Perhaps," he said gently, "it is wrong to thrust opinions on others unasked. I think that is so! It should be enough to act upon them one's self, and refrain from judging others."

The Colonel was a Sullivan and an Irishman, and it was supposed that he had followed the wars. Whence, then, these strange words, these unheard-of opinions? Morty felt his cheek flush with the shame which Colonel John should have felt; and Phelim grieved for the family. The gentleman might be mad; it was charitable to think he was. But, mad or sane, he was like, they feared, to be the cause of sad misunderstanding in the country round.

The McMurrough, of a harder and less generous nature than his companions, felt more contempt than wonder. The man had insulted him grossly, and had apologized as abjectly; that was his view of the incident. He was the first to break the silence. "Sure, it 's very well for the gentleman it 's in the family," he said dryly. "Tail up, tail down, 's all one among friends. But if he 'll be so quick with his tongue in Tralee Market, he 'll chance on one here and there that he 'll not blarney so easily! Eh, Morty?"

"I 'm fearing so, too," said Phelim pensively. Morty did not answer. "'T is a queer world," Phelim added.

"And all sorts in it," The McMurrough cried, his tone more arrogant than before.

Flavia glanced at him, frowning. "Let us have peace now," she said.

"Peace? Sorrow a bit of war there 's like to be in the present company!" the victor cried. And he began to whistle, amid an awkward silence. The air he chose was one well known at that day, and when he had whistled a few bars, one of the buckeens at the lower end of the table began to sing the words softly.

It was a' for our rightful king
  We left fair Ireland's strand!
It was a' for our rightful king
We e'er saw foreign land, my dear,
  We e'er saw foreign land!

"My dear, or no, you 'll be doing well to be careful!" The McMurrough said, in a jeering tone, with his eye on the Colonel.

"Pho!" the man replied. "And I that have heard the young mistress sing it a score of times!"

"Ay, but not in this company!" The McMurrough rejoined.

Colonel John looked round the table. "If you mean," he said quietly, "that I am a loyal subject of King George, I am that. But what is said at my host's table, no matter who he is, is safe for me. Moreover, I 've lived long enough to know, gentlemen, that most said is least meant, and that the theme of a lady's song is more often — sunset than sunrise!" And he bowed in the direction of the girl.

The McMurrough's lip curled. "Fair words," he sneered. "And easy to speak them, when you and your Protestant Whigs are on top!"

"We won't talk of Protestants," Colonel John replied; and for the first time his glance, keen as the flicker of steel, crossed The McMurrough's. The younger man's eyes fell.

The cudgels were taken up in an unexpected quarter. "I know nothing of Protestants in general," Flavia said, in a voice vibrating with eagerness, "but only, to our sorrow, of those who through centuries have robbed us! Who, not content, shame on them! with shutting us up in a corner of the land that was ours from sea to sea, deny us even here the protection of their law! Law? Can you call it law which denies us all natural rights, all honourable employments; which drives us abroad, divides son from father, and brother from brother; which bans our priests, and forbids our worship, and, if it had its will, would leave no Catholic from Cape Clear to Killaloe?"

The Colonel looked sorrowfully at her, but made no answer; for to much of what she said no answer could be made. On the other hand, a murmur passed round the board; and more than one looked at the stranger with compressed lips. "If you had your will," the girl continued, with growing emotion; "if your law were carried out — as, thank God! it is not, no man's heart being hard enough — to possess a pistol were to be pilloried; to possess a fowling-piece were to be whipped; to own a horse, above the value of a miserable garron, were to be robbed by the first rascal who passed! We must not be soldiers, nor sailors," she continued; "nay" — with bitter irony — "we may not be constables nor gamekeepers! The courts, the bar, the bench of our fatherland, are shut to us! We may have neither school nor college; the lands that were our fathers' must be held for us by Protestants, and it 's I must have a Protestant guardian! We are outlaws in the dear land that is ours; we dwell on sufferance where our fathers ruled! And men like you, abandoning their country, abandoning their creed ——"

"God forbid!" the Colonel exclaimed, much moved himself.

"Men like you uphold these things!"

"God forbid!" he repeated.

"But let Him forbid, or not forbid," she retorted, rising from her seat with eyes that flashed anger through tears, "we exist, and shall exist! And the time is coming, and comes soon — ay, comes perhaps to-day! — when we who now suffer for the true faith and the rightful King will raise our heads, and the Faithful Land shall cease to mourn and honest men to pine! And, ah" — with upraised face and clasped hands — "I pray for that day! I pray for that day! I ——"

She broke off amid cries of applause, fierce as the barking of wolves. She struggled for a moment with her overmastering emotion, then, unable to continue or to calm herself, she turned from the table and fled weeping up the stairs.

Colonel John had risen. He watched her go with deep feeling; he turned to his seat again with a sigh. He was a shade paler than before, and the eyes which he bent on the board were dark with thought. He was unconscious of all that passed round him, and, if aware, he was heedless of the strength of the passions which she had unbridled — until a hand fell on his arm.

He glanced up then and saw that all the men had risen, and were looking at him — even Ulick Sullivan — with dark faces. A passion of anger clouded their gaze. Without a word spoken, they were of one mind. The hand that touched him trembled, the voice that broke the silence shook under the weight of the speaker's feelings.

"You 'll be leaving here this day," the man muttered.

"I?" the Colonel said, taken by surprise. "Not at all."

"We wish you no harm, but to see your back."

The Colonel, his first wonder subdued, looked from one to another. "I am sure you wish me no harm," he said.

"None, but to see your back," the man repeated, while his companions looked down at the Colonel with a strange fixedness.

"But I cannot go," the Colonel answered, as gently as before.

"And why?" the man returned. The McMurrough was not of the speakers, but stood behind them, glowering at him with a dark face.

"Because," the Colonel answered, "I am in my duty here, my friends; and the man who is in his duty can suffer nothing."

"He can die," the man replied, breathing hard. The men who were on the Colonel's side of the table leant more closely about him.

But he seemed unmoved. "That," he replied cheerfully, "is nothing. To die is but an accident. Who dies in his duty suffers no harm. And were that not enough — and it is all," he continued slowly, "what harm should happen to me, a Sullivan among Sullivans? Because I have fared far and seen much, am I so changed that, coming back, I shall find no welcome on the hearth of my race, and no shelter where my fathers lie?"

"And are not our hearths cold over many a league? And the graves ——"

"Whisht!" a voice broke in sternly, as Uncle Ulick thrust his way through the group. "The man says well!" he continued. "He 's a Sullivan ——"

"He 's a Protestant!"

"He is a Sullivan, I say!" Uncle Ulick retorted, "were he the blackest heretic on the sod! And you, would you do the foul deed for a woman's wet eye? Are the hearts of Kerry turned as hard as its rocks? Make an end of this prating and foolishness! And you, James McMurrough, these are your men and this is your house? Will you be telling them at once that you will be standing between him and harm, be he a heretic ten times over? For shame, man! Is it for raising the corp of old Sir Michael from his grave ye are?"

The McMurrough looked sombrely at the big man. "On you be the risk," he said sullenly. "You know what you know."

"I know that the seal in the cave and the seal on the wave are one!" Ulick answered vehemently. "Whisht, man, whisht, and make an end! And do you, John Sullivan, give no thought to these omadhauns, but come with me and I'll show you to your chamber. A woman's tear is ever near her smile. With her the good thought treads ever on the heel of the bad word!"

"I have little knowledge of them," Colonel John answered quietly.

But when he was above with Uncle Ulick, he spoke. "I hope that this is but wild talk," he said. "You cannot remember, nor can I, the bad days. But the little that is left, it were madness and worse than madness to risk! If you've thought of a rising, in God's name put it from you. Think of your maids and your children! I have seen the fires rise from too many roofs, I have heard the wail of the homeless too often, I have seen too many frozen corpses stand for milestones by the road, I have wakened to the creak of too many gibbets — to face these things in my own land!"

Uncle Ulick was looking from the little casement. He turned, and showed a face working with agitation. "And you, if you wore no sword, nor dared wear one? If you walked in Tralee a clown among gentlefolk, if you lived a pariah in a corner of pariahs, if your land were the handmaid of nations, and the vampire crouched upon her breast, what — what would you do, then?"

"Wait," Colonel John answered gravely, "until the time came."

Uncle Ulick gripped his arm. "And if it came not in your time?"

"Still wait," Colonel John answered with solemnity. "For believe me, Ulick Sullivan, there is no deed that has not its reward! Not does one thatch go up in smoke that is not paid for a hundredfold."

"Ay, but when? When?"

"When the time is ripe."

CHAPTER IV

"STOP THIEF!"

A CANDID Englishman must own and deplore the fact that Flavia McMurrough's tears were due to the wrongs of her country. Broken by three great wars waged by three successive generations, defeated in the last of three desperate struggles for liberty, Ireland at this period lay like a woman swooning at the feet of her captors. Nor were these minded that she should rise again quickly, or in her natural force. The mastery which they had won by the sword the English were resolved to keep by the law.

They were determined that the Irishman of the old faith should cease to exist; or, if he endured, should be *nemo,* no one. Confined to hell or Connaught, he must not even in the latter possess the ordinary rights. He must not will his own lands or buy new lands. If his son, more sensible than he, "*went over,*" the father sank into a mere life-tenant, bound to furnish a handsome allowance, and to leave all to the Protestant heir. He might not marry a Protestant, he might not keep a school, nor follow the liberal professions. The priest who confessed him was banished if known, and hanged if he returned. In a country of sportsmen he might not own a fowling-piece, nor a horse worth more than five pounds; and in days when every gentleman carried a sword at his side, he must not wear one. Finally, his country grew but one article of great value — wool: and that he must not make into cloth, but he must sell it to England at England's price — which was one-fifth of the continental price. Was it wonderful that, such being Ireland's status, every Roman Catholic of spirit sought fortune abroad; that the wild geese, as they were called, went and came unchecked; or that every inlet in Galway, Clare, and Kerry swarmed with smugglers, who ran in under the green flag with brandy and claret, and, running out again with wool, laughed to scorn England's boast that she ruled the waves?

Nor was it surprising that, spent and helpless as the land lay, some sanguine spirits still clung to visions of a change and of revenge. The Sullivans of Morristown and Skull were of these; as were some of their neighbours. And Flavia was especially of these. As she looked from her window a day or two after the Colonel's arrival, as she sniffed the peat reek and plumbed the soft distances beyond the lake, she was lost in such a dream; until her eyes fell on a man seated cross-legged under a tree between herself and the shore. And she frowned. The man sorted ill with her dream.

It was Bale, Colonel John's servant. He was mending some article taken from his master's wardrobe. His elbow went busily to and fro as he plied the needle, while sprawling on the sod about him half a dozen gossoons watched him inquisitively.

Perhaps it was the suggestive contrast between his diligence and their idleness which irritated Flavia; but she set down her annoyance to another cause. The man was an Englishman, and therefore an enemy: and what did he there? Had the Colonel left him on guard?

Flavia's heart swelled at the thought. Here, at least, she and hers were masters. Colonel John had awakened mixed feelings in her. At times she admired him. But, admirable or not, he should rue his insolence, if he had it in his mind to push his authority, or interfere with her plans.

In the meantime she stood watching William Bale, and a desire to know more of the man, and through him of the master, rose within her. The house was quiet. The McMurrough and his following had gone to a cocking-match and race-meeting at Joyce's Corner. She went down the stairs, took her hood, and crossed the courtyard. Bale did not look up at her approach, but he saw her out of the corner of his eye, and when she paused before him he laid down his work and made as if he would rise.

She looked at him with a superciliousness not natural to her. "Are all the men tailors where you come from?" she asked. "There, you need not rise."

"Where I came from last," he replied, "we were all trades, my lady."

"Have you been a soldier long?" she asked, feeling herself rebuffed.

"Twenty-one years, my lady."

"And now you have done with it."

"It is as his honour pleases."

She frowned. He had a way of speaking that sounded uncivil to ears attuned to the soft Irish accent and the wheedling tone. Yet the man interested her, and after a moment's silence she fixed her eyes more intently on his work. "Did you lose your fingers in battle?" she asked. His right hand was maimed.

"No," he answered — grudgingly, as he seemed to answer all her questions — "in prison."

"In prison?" she repeated; "where?"

He cast an upward look at his questioner.

"In the Grand Turk's land," he said. "Nearer than that, I can't say. I 'm no scholar, my lady."

"But why?" she asked, puzzled. "I don't understand."

"Cut off," he said, stooping over his work.

Flavia turned a shade paler. "Why?" she repeated.

"'One God, and Mohommed His prophet' — could n't swallow it. One finger!" the man answered jerkily. "Next week — same. Third week ——"

"Third week?" she murmured, shuddering.

"Exchanged."

She lifted her eyes with an effort from his maimed hand. "How many were you?" she inquired.

"Thirty-four." He laughed drily. "We know one another when we meet," he said. He drew his waxed thread between his finger and thumb, held it up to the light, then looked askance at the gossoons about him, to whom what he said was gibberish. They knew only Erse.

The day was still, the mist lay on the lake, and under it the water gleamed, a smooth pale mirror. Flavia had seen it so a hundred times, and thought naught of it. But to-day, moved by what she had heard, the prospect spoke of a remoteness from the moving world which depressed her. Hitherto the quick pulse and the energy of youth had left her no time for melancholy, and not much for thought. If at rare intervals she had felt herself lonely, if she had been tempted to think that the brother in whom were centred her hopes, her affections, and her family pride was hard and selfish, rude and overbearing, she had told herself that all men were so; that all men rode roughshod over their women. And that being so, who had a better right to hector it than the last of the McMurroughs, heir of the Wicklow kings, who in days far past had dealt on equal terms with Richard Plantagenet, and to whom, by virtue of that never-forgotten kingship, the Sullivans and Mahonies, some of the McCarthys, and all the O'Beirnes, paid rude homage? With such feelings Sir Michael's strange whim of disinheriting the heir of his race had but drawn her closer to her brother. To her loyalty the act was abhorrent, one that could only have sprung, she was certain, from second childhood, the dotage of a man close on ninety, whose early years had been steeped in trouble, and who loved her so much that he was ready to do wrong for her sake.

Often she differed from her brother. But he was a man, she told herself; and he must be right — a man's life could not be ruled by the laws which a woman observed. For the rest, for herself, if her life seemed solitary she had the free air and the mountains; she had her dear land; above all, she had her dreams. Perhaps when these were realized — and the time seemed very near now — and a new Ireland was created, to her too a brighter world would open.

She had forgotten Bale's presence, and was only recalled to every-day life by the sound of voices. Four men were approaching the house. Uncle Ulick, Colonel John, and the French skipper were three of these; at the sight of the fourth Flavia's face fell. Luke Asgill of Batterstown was the nearest justice, and of necessity he was a Protestant. But it was not this fact, nor the certainty that Augustin was pouring his wrongs into his ears, that affected Flavia. Asgill was distasteful to her, because her brother affected him. For why should her brother have relations with a Protestant? Why should he, a man of the oldest blood, stoop to intimacy with the son of a "middleman," one of those who, taking a long lease of a great estate and underletting at rack rents, made at this period huge fortunes? Finally, if he must have relations with him, why did he not keep him at a distance from his home — and his sister?

It was too late, or she would have slipped away. Not that Asgill — he was a stout, dark, civil-spoken man of thirty-three or four — wore a threatening face. He greeted Flavia with an excess of politeness which she could have spared; and while Uncle Ulick and Colonel John looked perturbed and ill at ease, he jested on the matter.

"The whole cargo?" he said, with one eye on the Frenchman and one on his companions. "You 're not for stating that, sir?"

"All the tubs," Augustin answered in a passion of earnestness.

"The saints be between us and harm!" Asgill responded. "Are you hearing this, Miss Flavia? It 's no less than felony that you 're accused of, and I 'm thinking, by rights, I must arrest you and carry you to Batterstown."

"I do not understand," she answered stiffly. "And The McMurrough is not at home."

"Gone out of the way, eh?" Asgill replied with a deprecatory grin. "And the whole cargo was it, Captain?"

"All the tubs, perfectly!"

"You 'd paid your dues, of course?"

"Dues, *mon Dieu!* But they take the goods!"

"Had you paid your dues?"

"Not already, because ——"

"That 's unfortunate," Asgill answered in a tone of mock condolence. "Mighty unfortunate!" He winked at Uncle Ulick. "Port dues, you know, Captain, must be paid before the ship slips her moorings."

"But ——"

"Mighty unfortunate!"

"But what are the dues?" poor Augustin cried, dimly aware that he was being baited.

"Ah, you 're talking now," the magistrate answered glibly. "Unluckily, that 's not in my province. I 'm made aware that the goods are held under lien for dues, and I can do nothing. Upon payment, of course ——"

"But how much? Eh, sir? How much? How much?"

Luke Asgill, who had two faces, and for once was minded to let both be seen, enjoyed the Frenchmen's perplexity. He wished to stand well with Flavia, and here was a rare opportunity of exhibiting at once his friendliness and his powers of drollery. He was therefore taken aback, when a grave voice cut short his enjoyment.

"Still, if Captain Augustin," the voice interposed, "is willing to pay a reasonable sum on account of dues?"

The magistrate turned about abruptly. "Eh?" he said. "Oh, Colonel Sullivan, is it?"

"Then, doubtless, the goods will be released, so that he may perform his duty to his customer."

Asgill had only known the Colonel a few minutes, and, aware that he was one of the family, he did not see how to take it. It was as if treason lifted its head in the camp. He coughed.

"I 'd not be denying it," he said. "But until The McMurrough returns ——"

"Such a matter is doubtless within Mr. Sullivan's authority," the Colonel said, turning from him to Uncle Ulick.

Uncle Ulick showed his embarrassment. "Faith, I don't know that it is," he said.

"If Captain Augustin paid, say, twenty per cent. on his bills of lading ——"

"*Ma foi*, twenty per cent.!" the Captain exclaimed in astonishment. "Twenty — but yes, I will pay it. I will pay even that. Of what use to throw the handle after the hatchet?"

Luke Asgill thought the Colonel very simple. "Well, I 've nothing to say to this, at all!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "It 's not within my province."

Colonel John looked at the girl in a way in which he had not looked at her before; and she found herself speaking before she knew it. "Yes," she cried impulsively; "let that be done, and the goods be given up!"

"But The McMurrough?" Asgill began.

"I will answer for him," she said impulsively. "Uncle Ulick, go, I beg, and see it done."

"I will go with you," Colonel Sullivan said. "And doubtless Mr. Asgill will accompany us, to lend the weight of his authority in the event of any difficulty arising."

Asgill's countenance fell. He was between two stools, for he had no mind to displease Flavia or thwart her brother. At length, "No," he said, "I 'll not be doing anything in The McMurrough's absence."

Colonel John looked in the same strange fashion at Flavia. "I have legal power to act, sir," he said, "as I can prove to you in private. And that being so, I must certainly ask you to lend me the weight of your authority."

"And I will be hanged if I do!" Asgill cried. There was a change in his tone, and the reason was not far to seek. "Here 's The McMurrough!"

They all turned and looked along the road which ran by the edge of the lake. With James McMurrough, who was still a furlong away, were the two O'Beirnes. They came slowly, and something in their bearing, even at that distance, awoke anxiety.

"They 're early from the cocking," Uncle Ulick muttered doubtfully, "and sober as pigs! What 's the meaning of that? There 's something amiss, I 'm fearing."

A cry from Flavia proved the keenness of her eyes. "Where is Giralda?" she exclaimed. "Where is the mare?"

"Ay, what have they done with the mare?" Uncle Ulick said in a tone of consternation. "Have they lamed her, I 'm wondering? The garron Morty 's riding is none of ours."

"I begged him not to take her!" Flavia cried, anger contending with her grief. Giralda, her gray mare, ascribed in sanguine moments to the strain of the Darley Arabian, and as gentle as she was spirited, was the girl's dearest possession. "I begged him not to take her!" she repeated, almost in tears. "I knew there was danger."

"James was wrong to take her up country," Uncle Ulick said sternly.

"They 've claimed her!" Flavia wailed. "I know they have! And I shall never recover her! Oh, I 'd far rather she were dead!"

Uncle Ulick lifted up his powerful voice.

"Where 's the mare?" he shouted.

James McMurrough shrugged his shoulders; a moment later the riders came up and the tale was told. The three young men had halted at the hedge tavern at Brocktown, where their road ran out of the road to Tralee. There were four men drinking in the house, who seemed to take no notice of them. But when The McMurrough and his companions went to the shed beside the house to draw out their horses, the men followed, challenged them for Papists, threw down five pounds in gold, and seized the mare. The four were armed, and resistance was useless.

The story was received with a volley of oaths and curses. "But by the Holy," Uncle Ulick flamed up, "I 'd have hung on their heels and raised the country!"

"Ay, ay! The thieves of the world!"

"They took the big road by Tralee," James McMurrough explained sulkily. "What was the use?"

"Were there no men working in the bogs?"

"There were none near by, to be sure," Morty said. "But I 'd a notion if we followed them we might light on one friend or another — 't was in Kerry, after all!"

"'T was not more than nine miles English from here!" Uncle Ulick cried.

"That was just what I thought," Morty continued with some hesitation. "Just that, but ——" And his eye transferred the burden to The McMurrough.

James answered with an oath. "A nice time this to be bringing the soldiers upon us," he cried, "when, bedad, if the time ever was, we want no trouble with the Englishry! What 's the use of crying over spilled milk? I 'll give you another mare."

"But it 'll not be Giralda!" Flavia wailed.

"Sure it 's the black shame, it is!" Uncle Ulick cried, his face dark. "It 's enough to raise the country: Ay, I say it, though you 're listening, Asgill. It 's more than blood can stand!"

"No one is more sorry than myself," Asgill replied, with a look of concern. "I don't make the laws, or they 'd be other than they are!"

"True for you," Uncle Ulick answered. "I 'm allowing that. And it is true, too, that to make a stir too early would ruin all. I 'm afraid you must be making the best of it, Flavvy! I 'd go after them myself, but the time 's not convenient, as you know, and by this they 're in Tralee, bad cess to it, where there 's naught to be done. They 'll be for selling her to one of the garrison officers, I 'm thinking; or they 'll take her farther up country, maybe to Dublin."

Flavia's last hopes died with this verdict. She could not control her tears, and she turned and went away in grief to the house.

Meantime the hangers-on and the beggars pressed upon the gentry, anxious to hear. The McMurrough, not sorry to find some one on whom to vent his temper, turned upon them and drove them away with blows of his whip. The movement brought him face to face with Captain Augustin. The fiery little Frenchman disdained to give way, in a trice angry words passed, and — partly out of mischief, for the moment was certainly not propitious — Asgill repeated the proposal which Colonel John had just made. The Colonel thus challenged stood forward.

"It 's a fair compromise," he argued. "And if Captain Augustin is prepared to pay twenty per cent. ——"

"He 'll not have his cargo, nor yet a cask!" The

McMurrough replied with a curt, angry laugh. "Loss and enough we 've had to-day."

"But ——"

"Get me back the mare," the young man cried, cutting the Colonel short with savage ridicule. "That 's all I have to say."

"It seems to me," Colonel John replied quietly, "that those who lose should find. Still ——" checking the young man's anger by the very calmness of his tone, "for Captain Augustin's sake, who can ill bear the loss, and for your sister's sake, I will see what I can do."

The McMurrough stared. "You?" he cried. "You?"

"Yes, I."

"Heaven help us!" the young man laughed aloud in his scorn.

But Colonel John seemed no way moved.

"Yes," he replied. "Only let us understand one another" — with a look at Uncle Ulick which made him party to the bargain. "If I return to-morrow evening or on the following day — or week — with your sister's mare ——"

"Mounseer shall have his stuff again to the last pennyworth," young McMurrough returned with an ironical laugh, "and without payment at all! Or stay! Perhaps you 'll buy the mare?"

"No, I shall not buy her," Colonel John answered, "except at the price the man gave you."

"Then you 'll not get her. That 's certain! But it 's your concern."

The Colonel nodded, and, turning on his heels, went away toward the house, calling William Bale to him as he passed.

The McMurrough looked at the Frenchman. He had a taste for tormenting some one. "Well, monsieur," he jeered, "how do you like your bargain?"

"I do not understand," the Frenchman answered. "But he is a man of his word, *ma foi!* And they are not — of the common."

CHAPTER V

THE MESS-ROOM AT TRALEE

EARLY in the saddle, Colonel Sullivan rode eastward under Slieve Mish, with the sun rising above the lower spurs of the mountain, and the lark saluting the new-born radiance with a song attuned to the freshness of the morning.

Bale rode behind him, taciturn, comparing the folds of his native Suffolk hills with these greener vales. They reached the hedge tavern, where the mare had been seized, and they stayed to bait their horses, but got no news. About eight they rode on; and five long Irish miles nearer Tralee, they viewed from the crest of a hill a piece of road stretched ribbon-like before them, and on it a man walking from them at a great pace. He had for companion a boy, who trotted beside him.

Neither man nor boy looked back, and it did not seem to be from fear of the two riders that they moved so quickly. The man wore a loose drugget coat and an old jockey-cap, and walked with a stout six-foot staff. Thus armed he should have stood in small fear of robbers. Yet when Colonel John's horse, the tread of its hoofs deadened by the sod road, showed its head at his shoulder, he turned a face of more vivid alarm than seemed necessary. And he crossed himself.

Colonel John touched his hat. "I give you good morning, good man," he said.

The walker raised his hand to his cap as if to return the salute, but lowered it without doing so. He muttered something.

"You will be in haste?" Colonel John continued. He saw that the sweat stood in beads on the man's brow, and the lad's face was tear-stained.

"I 've far to go," the man muttered. He spoke with a slight foreign accent, but in the west of Ireland this was common. "The top of the morning to you."

Plainly he wished the two riders to pass on, but he did not slacken his speed for a moment. So for a space they went abreast, the man, with every twenty paces, glancing up suspiciously. And now and again, the boy, as he ran or walked, vented a sob.

The Colonel looked about him. The solitude of the valley was unbroken. No cabin smoked, no man worked within sight, so that the haste of these two, their sweating faces, their straining steps, seemed portentous. "Shall I take up the lad?" Colonel John asked.

Plainly the man hesitated. Then, "You will be doing a kindness," he panted. And, seizing the lad in two powerful arms, he swung him to the Colonel's stirrup, who, in taking him, knocked off the other's jockey-cap.

The man snatched it up and put it on with a single movement. But Colonel John had seen what he expected.

"You walk on a matter of life and death?" he said.

"It is all that," the man answered; and this time his look was defiant.

"You are taking the offices, father?"

The man did not reply.

"To one who is near his end, I suspect?"

The priest — for such he was — glanced at the weapon Colonel John wore. "You can do what you will," he said sullenly. "I am on my duty."

"And a fine thing, that!" Colonel John answered heartily. He drew rein, and, before the other knew what he would be at, he was off his horse. "Mount, father," he said, "and ride, and God be with you!"

For a moment the priest stared dumfounded.

"Sir," he said, "you wear a sword! And no son of the Church goes armed in these parts."

"If I am not one of your Church I am a Christian," Colonel John answered. "Mount, father, and ride in God's name, and when you are there send the lad back with the beast."

"The Mother of God reward you!" the priest cried fervently, "and turn your heart in the right way!" He scrambled to the saddle. "The blessing of all ——"

The rest was lost in the thud of hoofs as the horse started briskly, leaving Colonel John standing alone upon the road beside Bale's stirrup.

"It 's something if a man serves where he 's listed," Colonel John remarked.

Bale smiled. "And don't betray his own side," he said. He slipped from his saddle.

"You think it 's the devil's work we 've done?" Colonel John asked.

But Bale declined to say more, and the two walked on, one on either side of the horse.

They had trudged the better part of two miles when they came upon the horse tethered by the reins to one of two gate-pillars. Colonel John got to his saddle, and they trotted on. Notwithstanding, it was late in the afternoon when they approached the town of Tralee.

As the Colonel eyed the mean houses which flanked the entrance to the town, he recognized that if all the saints had not vouchsafed their company, the delay caused by the meeting with the priest had done somewhat. For at that precise moment a man was riding into the town before them, and the horse under the man was Flavia McMurrough's lost mare.

Colonel John's eye lightened as he recognized its points. With a sign to Bale he fell in behind the man and followed him through two or three ill-paved and squalid streets. Presently the rider passed through a loop-holed gateway, crossed an open space surrounded by dreary buildings which no military eye could take for aught but a barrack yard. The two still followed — the sentry staring after them. On the far side of the yard the mare and its rider vanished through a second archway, which appeared to lead to an inner court. The Colonel went after them. Fortune, he thought, had favoured him.

But as he emerged from the tunnel-like passage he raised his head in astonishment. A din of voices, an outbreak of laughter and revelry, burst in a flood of sound upon his ears. He turned his face in the direction whence the sounds came, and saw three open windows, and at each window three or four flushed countenances. His sudden emergence from the tunnel, perhaps his look of surprise, wrought an instant's silence, which was followed by a ruder outburst.

"Cock! cock! cock!" shrieked a tipsy voice, and an orange, hurled at random, missed the Colonel's astonished face by a yard. The mare which had led him so far had disappeared, and instinctively he drew bridle. He stared at the window!

"Mark one!" cried a second roisterer, and a cork, better aimed than the orange, struck the Colonel sharply on the chin. A shout of laughter greeted the hit.

He raised his hat. "Gentlemen," he remonstrated, "gentlemen ——"

He could proceed no further. A flight of corks, a renewed cry of "Cock! cock! cock!" a chorus of "Fetch him, Ponto! Dead, good dog!" drowned his remonstrances. Perhaps in the scowling face at his elbow the wits of the —th found more amusement than in the master's mild astonishment.

"Who the deuce is he?" cried one of the seniors, raising his voice above the uproar. "English or Irish?"

"Irish for a dozen!" a voice answered. "Here, Paddy, where 's your papers?"

"Ay, be jabers!" in an exaggerated brogue; "it 's the broth of a boy he is, and never a face as long as his in ould Ireland!"

"Gentlemen," the Colonel said, getting in a word at last. "Gentlemen, I have been in many companies before this, and ——"

"You shall be in ours!" one of the revellers retorted. And "Have him in! Fetch him in!" roared a dozen voices, amid much laughter. Half as many young fellows leaped from the windows, and surrounded him. "Who-whoop!" cried one, "Who-whoop!"

"Steady, gentlemen, steady!" the Colonel said, a note of sternness in his voice. "I 've no objection to joining you, or to a little timely frolic, but ——"

"Join us you will, whether or no!" replied one more turbulent than the rest. He made as if he would lay hands on the Colonel, and, to avoid violence, the latter suffered himself to be helped from his saddle. In a twinkling he was through the doorway, leaving his reins in Bale's hand.

Boisterous cries of "Hallo, sobersides!" and "Cock, cock, cock!" greeted the Colonel, as, partly of his own accord and partly urged by unceremonious hands, he crossed the threshold.

The scene presented by the apartment matched the flushed faces which the windows had framed. A corner of the table had been cleared for a main at hazard; but to make up for this the sideboard was a wilderness of broken meats and piled-up dishes, and an overturned card-table beside one of the windows had strewn the floor with cards.

Here, there, everywhere on chairs, on hooks, were cast sword-belts, neckcloths, neglected wigs.

A peaceful citizen of that day had as soon found himself in a bear-pit; and even the Colonel's face grew a trifle longer as hands, not too gentle, conducted him toward the end of the table. "Gentlemen, gentlemen," he began, "I have been in many companies, as I said before, and ——"

"A speech! Old Gravity's speech!" roared a middle-aged, bold-eyed man, who had suggested the sally from the windows, and from the first had set the younger spirits an example of recklessness. "Hear to him!" He filled a glass of wine and waved it perilously near the Colonel's nose. "Old Gravity's speech! Give it tongue!" he cried. "The flure's your own, and we 're listening."

Colonel John eyed him with a slight contraction of the features. But the announcement, if ill-meant, availed to procure silence. The more sober had resumed their seats. He raised his head and spoke.

"Gentlemen," he said — and it was strange to note the effect of his look as his eyes fell first on one and then on another, fraught with a dignity which insensibly wrought on them. "Gentlemen, I have been in many companies, and I have found it true, all the world over, that what a man brings he finds. I have the honour to speak to you as a soldier to soldiers ——"

"English or Irish?" asked a tall sallow man — sharply, but in a new tone.

"Irish!"

"Oh, be jabers!" from the man with the wineglass.

But the Colonel's eye and manner had had their effect, and "Let him speak!" the sallow man said. "And you, Payton, have done with your fooling, will you?"

"Well, hear to him!"

"I have been in many camps and many companies, gentlemen," the Colonel resumed, "and those of many nations. But wherever I have been I have found that if a man brought no offence, he received none. I am a stranger here, for I have been out of my own country for a score of years. On my return you welcome me," he smiled, "a little boisterously perhaps, but I am sure, gentlemen, with a good intent. And as I have fared elsewhere I am sure I shall fare at your hands."

"Well, sure," from the background, "and have n't we made you welcome?"

"Almost too freely," the Colonel replied, smiling good-humouredly. "A peaceable man who had not lived as long as I have might have found himself at a loss in face of so strenuous a welcome. Corks, perhaps, are more in place in bottles ——"

"And a dale more in place out of them!" from the background.

"But if you will permit me to explain my errand, I will say no more of that. My name, gentlemen, is Sullivan, Colonel John Sullivan of Skull, formerly of the Swedish service, and much at your service. I shall be still more obliged if any of you will be kind enough to inform me who is the purchaser ——"

Payton interrupted him rudely. "We have had enough of this!" he cried. "Sink all purchasers, I say!" And with a drunken crow he thrust his neighbour against the speaker, causing both to reel. How it happened no one saw — whether Payton himself staggered in the act, or flung the wine wantonly; but somehow the contents of his glass flew over the Colonel's face and neckcloth.

Half a dozen men rose from their seats. "Shame!" an indignant voice cried.

Among those who had risen was the sallow man. "Payton," he said sharply, "what did you do that for?"

"Because I choose, if you like!" the stout man answered. "What is it to you? I am ready to give him satisfaction when he likes, and where he likes, and no heel-taps! And what more can he want? Do you hear, sir?" he continued in a bullying tone. "Sword or pistols, before breakfast or after dinner, drunk or sober, Jack Payton 's your man. It shall never be said in my time that the —th suffered a crop-eared Irishman to preach to them in their own mess-room! You can send your friend to me when you please. He 'll find me!"

The Colonel was wiping the wine from his chin and neckcloth. He had turned strangely pale at the moment of the insult. More than one of those who watched him curiously, noting the slow preciseness of his movements, expected some extraordinary action.

But no one looked for anything so abnormal as the course he took when he spoke. Nothing in his bearing had prepared them for it; nor anything in his conduct which, so far, had been that of a man of the world not too much at a loss even in the unfavourable circumstances in which he was placed.

"I do not fight," he said. "Your challenge is cheap, sir, as your insult."

Payton stared. He had never been more astonished in his life. "You do not fight? Heaven and earth! and you a soldier!"

"I do not fight."

"After that, man! Not — after ——"

"No," Colonel John said between his teeth.

And then no one spoke. A something in Colonel John's tone sobered the spectators, and turned that which might have seemed an ignominy into a tragedy in which they all had their share. For the insult had been so wanton, that there was not one of the witnesses whose sympathy had not been with the victim.

Payton alone was moved only by contempt.

"Heavens, man!" he cried, finding his voice again. "Are you a Quaker? If so, why do you call yourself a soldier?"

"I am no Quaker," Colonel John answered, "but I do not fight duels."

"Why?"

"If I killed you," the Colonel replied, eyeing him steadily, "would it dry my neckcloth or clean my face?"

"No!" Payton retorted with a sneer, "but it would clean your honour! It would prove, man, that, unlike the beasts that perish, you valued something more than your life!"

"I do."

"What?" Payton asked with careless disdain.

"Among other things, my duty."

Payton laughed brutally. "Why, by the powers, you *are* a preacher!" he retorted "Hang your duty, sir, and you for a craven! Give me acts, not words! It 's a man's duty to defend his honour, and you talk of your neckcloth! There 's for a new neckcloth!" He pulled out a half-crown and flung it, with an insulting gesture, upon the table. "Show us your back, and for the future give gentlemen of honour a wide berth! You are no mate for them!"

The act and the words were too strong. A murmur rose — for if Payton was feared he was not loved; and the sallow-faced man, whose name was Marsh, spoke out. "Easy, Payton," he said. "The gentleman ——"

"The gentleman, eh?"

"Did not come here of his own accord, and you 've said enough, and done enough! For my part ——"

"I did n't ask for your interference!" the other cried insolently.

"Well, anyway ——"

"And I don't want it! And I won't have it; do you hear, Marsh?" Payton repeated menacingly. "You know me, and I know you."

"I know that you are a better fencer and a better shot than I am," Marsh replied, shrugging his shoulders, "and

I daresay than any of us. We are apt to believe it, anyway. But ——"

"I would advise you to let that be enough," Payton sneered.

It was then that the Colonel spoke — and in a tone somewhat altered. "I am much obliged to you, sir," he said, addressing the sallow-faced man. "I crave leave to say one word only, which may come home to some among you. We are all, at times, at the mercy of mean persons. Yes, sir, of mean persons," the Colonel repeated, in a tone so determined that Payton, in the act of seizing a decanter to hurl at him, hesitated. "For any but a mean person," Colonel John continued, drawing himself up to his full height, "finding that he had insulted one who could not meet him on even terms, would have deemed it the same as if he had insulted a one-armed man, or a blind man, and would have set himself right by an apology."

At that word Payton found his voice. "Hang your apology!" he cried furiously.

"By an apology," the Colonel repeated, fixing him with eyes of unmeasured contempt, "which would have lowered him no more than an apology to a woman or a child. Not doing so, his act dishonours himself only, and those who sit with him. And one day, unless I mistake not, his own blood, and the blood of others, will rest upon his head."

With that word the speaker turned slowly, walked with an even pace to the door, and opened it, none gainsaying him. On the threshold he paused and looked back. Something, possibly some chord of superstition in his breast which his adversary's last words had touched, held Payton silent: and silent the Colonel's raised finger found him.

"I believe," Colonel John said, gazing solemnly at him, "that we shall meet again." And he went out.

Payton turned to the table, and with an unsteady hand filled a glass. "Sink the old Square-Toes!" he cried. "He got what he deserved! Who 'll throw a main with me?"

"Thirty guineas against your new mare, if you like?"

"No, confound you," Payton retorted angrily. "Did n't I say she was n't for sale?"

CHAPTER VI

THE MAÎTRE D'ARMES

BEYOND doubt Colonel John was, as he retired, as unhappy as a more ordinary man might have been in the same case. He knew that he was no craven, that he had given his proofs a score of times. But old deeds and a foreign reputation availed nothing here, and it was with a deep sense of vexation and shame that he rode out of the barrack-yard. Nor were his spirits low on this account only.

He knew that he could only get the mare from those who held her by imposing himself upon them; and to do this after what had happened seemed impossible. If he was anxious to recover the mare, his anxiety did not rest there. Her recovery was but a step to that influence at Morristown which would make him potent for good; to that consideration which would enable him to expel foolish counsels, and silence that simmering talk of treason which might at any moment boil up into action and ruin a countryside.

The story would be told, must be told: it would be carried far and wide; and he had come off so ill, had cut so poor a figure, that after this he could hope for nothing from his personal influence here or at Morristown. Nothing, unless he could set himself right at Tralee.

He brooded long over the matter and at length hit on a plan, promising, though distasteful. He called Bale, and made inquiries through that taciturn man. Next morning he sat late at his breakfast. He had learned that the garrison used the inn much, many of the officers calling there for their "morning"; and the information proved correct. About ten he heard heavy steps in the stone-paved passage, spurs rang out an arrogant challenge, and voices called for Patsy and Molly. By and by two officers, almost lads, sauntered into the room and, finding him there, moved with a wink and a grin to the window. They leaned out, and he heard them laugh; he knew that they were discussing him before they turned to the daily fare — the neat ankles of a passing colleen, the glancing eyes of the French milliner over the way, or the dog-fight at the corner. The two remained thus until presently the sallow-faced man sauntered idly into the room.

He did not see the Colonel at once, but the latter rose and bowed. Marsh, a little added colour in his face, returned the salute — with an indifferent grace. It was clear that, though he had behaved better than his fellows on the previous day, he had no desire to push the acquaintance farther.

Colonel John, however, gave him no chance. Still standing, and with a grave, courteous face, "May I, as a stranger," he said, "trouble you with a question, sir?"

The two lady-killers at the window heard the words and nudged one another, with a stifled chuckle at their comrade's predicament. Captain Marsh, with one eye on them, assented stiffly.

"Is there any one," the Colonel asked, "in Tralee — I fear the chance is small — who gives fencing lessons?"

The Captain's look of surprise yielded to one of pitying comprehension. He smiled — he could not help it; while the young men drew in their heads to hear the better.

"Yes," he answered, "there is."

"In the regiment, I presume?"

"He is attached to it temporarily. If you will inquire at the Armoury for Lemoine, the *maître d'armes*, he will oblige you, I have no doubt. But ——"

"If you please?" the Colonel said politely, seeing that Marsh hesitated.

"If you are not a skilled swordsman, I fear that it is not one lesson, or two, or a dozen, will enable you to meet Captain Payton, if you have such a thing in your mind, sir. He is but little weaker than Lemoine, and Lemoine is a fair match with a small-sword for any man out of London. Brady in Dublin, possibly, but ——" he stopped abruptly, his ear catching a snigger at the window.

"Still," the Colonel answered simply, "a long reach goes for much, I have heard, and I am tall."

Captain Marsh looked at him in pity, and he might have put his compassion into words, but for the young bloods at the window, who, he knew, would repeat the conversation. He contented himself, therefore, with saying rather curtly, "I believe it goes some way." And he turned stiffly to go out.

But the Colonel had a last question to put to him. "At what hour," he asked, "should I be most likely to find this — Lemoine at leisure?"

"Lemoine?"

"If you please."

Marsh opened his mouth to answer, but found himself anticipated by one of the youngsters. "Three in the afternoon is the best time," the lad said bluntly, speaking over his shoulder. He popped out his head again, that his face, swollen by his perception of the jest, might not betray it.

But the Colonel seemed to see nothing. "I thank you," he said, bowing courteously.

And reseating himself, as Marsh went out, he finished his breakfast. The two at the window, after exploding once or twice in an attempt to stifle their laughter, drew in their heads, and, still red in the face, marched solemnly past the Colonel, and out of the room. His seat, now the window was clear, commanded a view of the street, and presently he saw the two young bloods go by in the company of four or five of their like. They were gesticulating, nor was there much doubt, from the laughter with which their tale was received, that they were retailing a joke of signal humour.

That did not surprise the Colonel. But when the door opened a moment later, and Marsh came hastily into the room, and with averted face began to peer about for something, he was surprised.

"Where's that snuff-box!" the sallow-faced man exclaimed. Then, looking about him to make sure that the door was closed. "See here, sir," he said awkwardly, "it 's no business of mine, but for a man who has served as you say you have, you 're a very simple fellow. Take my advice and don't go to Lemoine's at three, if you go at all."

"No?" the Colonel echoed.

"Can't you see they 'll all be there to guy you?" Marsh retorted impatiently. The next moment, with a hasty nod, he was gone, He had found the box in his pocket.

Colonel Sullivan smiled, and rose from the table. "A good man," he muttered. "Pity he has not more courage." The next moment he came to attention, for slowly past the window moved Captain Payton himself, riding Flavia's mare, and talking with one of the young bloods who walked at his stirrup.

The man and the horse! The Colonel began to understand that something more than wantonness had inspired Payton's conduct the previous night. He had had an interest in nipping inquiry in the bud; and, learning who the Colonel was, had acted on the instant, and with considerable presence of mind.

The Colonel remained within doors until five minutes before three o'clock. Then, attending to the directions he had received, he made his way to a particular door a little within the barrack gate.

Had he glanced up at the windows he would have seen faces at them; moreover, a suspicious ear might have caught a scurrying of feet, mingled with stifled laughter. But he did not look up. He did not seem to expect to see more than he found, when he entered — a great bare room with its floor strewn with sawdust and its walls adorned here and there by a gaunt trophy of arms. In the middle of the floor, engaged apparently in weighing one foil against another, was a stout, dark man, whose light and nimble step gave the lie to his weight.

Certainly there came from a half-opened door at the end of the room a stealthy sound as of rats taking cover. But Colonel John did not look that way. His whole attention was bent upon the *maître d'armes,* who bowed low to him. Clicking his heels together, and extending his palms in the French fashion. "Good morning, sare," he said, his southern accent unmistakable. "I make you welcome."

The Colonel returned his salute less elaborately

"The *maître d'armes,* Lemoine?" he said.

"Yes, sare, that is me. At your service!"

"I am a stranger in Tralee, and I have been recommended to apply to you. You are, I am told, accustomed to give lessons."

"With the small-sword?" the Frenchman answered, with the same gesture of the open hands. "It is my profession."

"I am desirous of brushing up my knowledge — such as it is."

"A vare good notion," the fencing-master replied, his black, beady eyes twinkling. "Vare good for me. Vare good also for you. Always ready, is the gentleman's motto; and to make himself ready, his high recreation. But, doubtless, sare," with a faint smile, "you are proficient, and I teach you nothing. You come but to sweat a little."

"At one time," Colonel John replied with simplicity, "I was fairly proficient. Then — this happened!" He held out his right hand. "You see?"

"Ah!" the Frenchman said in a low tone, and he raised his hands. "That is ogly! That is vare ogly! Can you hold with that?" he added, inspecting the hand with interest. He was a different man.

"So, so," the Colonel answered cheerfully.

"Not strongly, eh? It is not possible."

"Not very strongly," the Colonel assented. His hand, like Bale's, lacked two fingers.

Lemoine muttered something under his breath, and looked at the Colonel with a wrinkled brow. "Tut — tut!" he said, "and how long are you like that, sare?"

"Seven years."

"Pity! pity!" Lemoine exclaimed. Again he looked at his visitor with perplexed eyes. After which, "Peste!" he said suddenly.

The Colonel stared.

"It is not right!" the Frenchman continued, frowning. "I — no! Pardon me, sare, I do not fence with *les estropiés*. That is downright! That is certain, sare. I do not do it."

If the Colonel had been listening he might have caught the sound of a warning cough, proceeding from the direction of the inner room; but he had his back to the half-opened door. "But if," he objected, "I am willing to pay for an hour's practice?"

"Another day, sare. Another day, if you will."

"But I shall not be here another day. I have but to-day. By and by," he continued with a smile as kindly as it was humorous, "I shall begin to think that you are afraid to pit yourself against a *manchot!*"

"Oh, là! là!"

"Do me the favour, then," Colonel John retorted. "If you please?"

Against one of the walls were three chairs arranged in a row. Before each stood a boot-jack, and beside it a pair of boot-hooks; over it, fixed in the wall, were two or three pegs for the occupant's wig, cravat, and cane. The Colonel, without waiting for a further answer, took his seat on one of the chairs, removed his boots, and then his coat, vest, and wig, which he hung on the pegs above him.

"And now," he said gaily, as he stood up, "the mask!"

He did not see the change, but as he rose, the door of the room behind him became fringed with grinning faces. Payton, the two youths who had leaned from the window of the inn, a couple of older officers, half a dozen subalterns, all were there. The more grave could hardly keep the more hilarious in order. The stranger who fought no duels, yet thought that a lesson or two would make him a match for a dead-hand like Payton — was ever such a promising joke conceived?

The Frenchman made no further demur. He took his mask, and proffered a choice of foils to his antagonist, whose figure, freed from the heavy coat and vest of the day, seemed more supple than the Frenchman had expected. "A pity, a pity!" the latter said to himself. "To have lost, if he ever was professor, the joy of life!"

"Are you ready?" Colonel John asked.

"At your service, sare," the *maître d'armes* replied. The two advanced each a foot, they touched swords, then saluted with that graceful and courteous engagement which to an ignorant observer is one of the charms of the foil. As they did so, and steel grated on steel, the eavesdroppers in the inner room ventured softly from ambush — like rats issuing forth.

They were on the broad grin when they came out. But it took them less than a minute to discover that the entertainment was not likely to be so extravagantly funny as they had hoped. The Colonel was not, strictly speaking a tyro; moreover, he had, as he said, a long reach. He was no match indeed for Lemoine, who touched him twice in the first bout and might have touched him thrice had he put forth his strength. But he did nothing absurd. When he dropped his point, therefore, at the end of the rally, and turning to take breath came face to face with the gallery of onlookers, the best-natured of these felt rather foolish. But Colonel John seemed to find nothing surprising in their presence. He saluted them courteously with his weapon. "I am afraid I cannot show you much sport, gentlemen," he said.

One or two muttered something — a good day, or the like. The rest grinned unmeaningly. Payton said nothing, but, folding his arms with a superior air, leaned frowning against the wall.

"*Parbleu,*" said Lemoine, as they rested. "It is a pity. The wrist is excellent, sare. But the pointing finger is not — is not!"

"I do my best," the Colonel answered, with cheerful resignation. "Shall we engage again?"

"At your pleasure."

The Frenchman's eye no longer twinkled; his gallantry was on its mettle. He was grave and severe, fixing his gaze on the Colonel's attack, and remaining blind to the nods and shrugs of his patrons in the background. Again he touched the Colonel, and, alas! again, with an ease he could not mask.

Colonel John, a little breathed, and perhaps a little chagrined also, dropped his point. Some one coughed, and another tittered.

"I think he will need another lesson or two," Payton remarked, loudly enough for all to hear.

The man whom he addressed made an inaudible answer. The Colonel turned toward them.

"And — a new hand," Payton added in the same tone.

Even for his henchman the remark was almost too much. But the Colonel, strange to say seemed to find nothing offensive in it. On the contrary, he replied to it.

"That was precisely," he said, "what I thought when this" — he indicated his maimed hand — "happened to me. And I did my best to procure one."

"Did you succeed?" Payton retorted in an insolent tone.

"To some extent," the Colonel replied, in the most matter-of-fact manner. And he transferred the foil to his left hand.

"Give you four to one," Payton rejoined, "Lemoine hits you twice before you hit him once."

Colonel John had anticipated some of the things that had happened. But he had not foreseen this. He was quick to see the use to which he might put it, and it was only for an instant that he hesitated. Then "Four to one?" he repeated.

"Five, if you like!" Payton sneered.

"If you will wager," the Colonel said slowly, "if you will wager the gray mare you were riding this morning, sir ——"

Payton uttered an angry oath. "What do you mean?" he said.

"Against ten guineas," Colonel John continued carelessly, bending the foil against the floor and letting it spring to its length again," I will make that wager."

Payton scowled at him. He was aware of the other's interest in the mare, and suspected that he had come to town to recover her. And caution would have had him refuse the snare. But his toadies were about him, he had long ruled the roost, to retreat went against the grain; while to suppose that the man had the least chance against

Lemoine was absurd. Yet he hesitated. "What do you know about the mare?" he said coarsely.

"I have seen her. But of course, if you are afraid to wager her, sir ——"

Payton answered to the spur. "Bah! Afraid?" he cried contemptuously. "Done with you!"

"That is settled," the Colonel replied. "I am at your service," he continued, turning to the *maître d'armes.* "I trust," indicating that he was going to fence with his left hand, "that this will not embarrass you?"

"No! But it is interesting, vare interesting," the Frenchman replied. "I have encountered *les gauchers* before, and ——"

He did not finish the sentence, but saluting, he assumed an attitude a little more wary than usual. The foils felt one another, and "*Oh, va, va!*" he muttered. "I understand the droll!"

For half a minute or so the faces of the onlookers reflected only a mild surprise, mingled with curiosity. But the fencers had not made more than half a dozen serious passes before this was changed, before one face grew longer and another more intent. A man who was no fencer, and therefore no judge, spoke. A fierce oath silenced him. Another murmured an exclamation under his breath. Payton's face became slowly a dull red. At length, "Ha!" cried one, drawing in his breath. And he was right. The *maître d'armes*' button, sliding under the Colonel's blade, had touched his opponent. At once, Lemoine sprang back out of danger, the two points dropped, the two fencers stood back to take breath.

For a few seconds the Colonel's chagrin was plain. Then he conquered the feeling, and smiled. "I fear you are too strong for me," he said.

"Not at all," the Frenchman made answer. "Not at all! It was fortune, sare. I know not what you were with your right hand, but you are with the left vare strong, of the first force. It is certain."

Payton, an expert, had been among the earliest to discern the Colonel's skill. With a sudden sinking of the heart, he had foreseen the figure he would cut if Lemoine were worsted; he had endured a moment of great fear. But at this success he choked down his apprehension. One more hit, one more success on Lemoine's part, and he had won the wager! But he could no longer bear himself carelessly. While he faltered, seeking for a gibe and finding none, the two combatants had crossed their foils again. Their tense features, their wary movements, made it clear that they played for a victory of which neither was confident.

Apart from the wager, it was clear that if Lemoine had not met his match, the Captain had; and doubtless many in the room, on whose toes Payton had trodden, felt secret joy, pleased that the bully of the regiment was like to meet with a reverse and a master.

Whatever their thoughts, a quick rally riveted all eyes on the fencers. For a moment thrust and parry followed one another so rapidly that the untrained gaze could not distinguish them or trace the play. The spectators held their breath, expecting a hit with each second. But the rally died away again, neither of the players had got through the other's guard; and now they fell to it more slowly, the Colonel, a little winded, giving ground, and Lemoine pressing him.

Then, no one saw precisely how it happened, whiff-whaff, Lemoine's weapon flew from his hand and struck the wall with a whirr and a jangle. The fencing-master wrung his wrist. "*Sacre!*" he cried, between his teeth, unable in the moment of surprise to control his chagrin.

The Colonel touched him with his button for form's sake, then stepped rapidly to the wall, picked up the foil by the blade, and courteously returned it to him. Two or three cried "Bravo," but faintly, as barely comprehending what had happened. The greater part stood silent in sheer astonishment. Payton remained dumb with mortification and disgust.

Lemoine, indeed, the person more immediately concerned, had eyes only for his opponent, whom he regarded with a queer mixture of approval and vexation. "You have been at Angelo's school in Paris, sare?" he said, in the tone of one who stated a fact rather than asked a question.

"It is true," the Colonel answered, smiling.

"And learned that trick from him?"

"I did. It is of little use except to a left-handed man."

"Yet in play with one not of the first force it succeeds twice out of three times," Lemoine answered. "Twice out of three times, with the right hand. *Ma foi!* I remember it well! I offered the master twenty guineas, monsieur, if he would teach it me. But because" — he held out his palms pathetically — "I was right-handed, he would not."

"I am fortunate," Colonel John answered, bowing, "in being able to requite your good nature. I shall be pleased to teach it you for nothing, but not now. Gentlemen," he continued, giving up his foil to Lemoine, and removing his mask, "gentlemen, you will bear me witness I trust, that I have won the wager?"

Some nodded, some murmured an affirmative, others turned toward Payton, who nodded sullenly. How willingly at that moment would he have laid the Colonel dead at his feet, and Lemoine, and the whole crew, friends and enemies! "Oh, hang you!" he said, "Take the mare, she 's in the stable!"

At that a brother officer touched his arm, and drew him aside. The intervener seemed to be reminding him of something; and the Colonel, not inattentive, caught the name "Asgill" twice repeated. But Payton was too angry to care for minor consequences. He shook off his adviser with a rough hand.

"What do I care?" he answered. "He must shoe his own cattle!" Then, with a poor show of hiding his spite under a cloak of insouciance, he addressed the Colonel. "The mare is yours," he said. "Much good may she do you!"

And he turned on his heel and went out of the armoury.

CHAPTER VII

BARGAINING

IT WAS perhaps because Flavia often sought the tower beside the waterfall at sunset, and he had noted the fact, that Luke Asgill's steps bore him thither on an evening three days after the Colonel's departure for Tralee. Asgill had remained at Morristown, though the girl had not hidden her distaste for his presence. But to all her remonstrances The McMurrough had replied, with his usual churlishness, that the man was there on business — did she want to recover her mare, or did she not? And she had found nothing more to say. But the most slavish observance on the guest's part, and some improvement in her brother's conduct — which she might have rightly attributed to Asgill's presence — had not melted her.

Be that as it might, Asgill did not find her at the tower. But he thought that she might still come, and he waited, sitting low, with his back against the ruined wall, that she might not see him until it was too late for her to retreat. By and by he heard footsteps mounting the path; his face reddened, and he made as if he would rise. But the face that rose above the brow was not Flavia's, but her brother's. And Asgill swore.

The McMurrough understood, grinned, and threw himself on the ground beside him. "You 'll be wishing me in the devil's bowl, I 'm thinking," he said. "Yet, faith, I 'm not so sure — if you 're not a fool. For it 's certain I am you 'll never touch so much as the sole of her foot without me."

"I 'm not denying it," the other answered sulkily.

"So it 's mighty little use your wishing me away!" The McMurrough continued, stretching himself at his ease. "You can't get her without me; nor at all, at all but on my terms! It would be a fine thing for you, no doubt, if you could sneak round her behind my back! Don't I know you 'd be all for old Sir Michael's will then, and I might die in a gutter. for you! But an egg, and an egg 's fair sharing."

"Have I said it was any other?" Asgill asked gloomily.

"The old place is mine, and I 'm minded to keep it."

"And if any other marries her," Asgill said quietly, "he will want her rights."

"Well, and do you think," the younger man answered in his ugliest manner, "that if it were n't for that small fact, Mister Asgill ——"

"And the small fact," Asgill struck in, "that before your grandfather died I lent you a clear five hundred, and I 'm to take that, that 's my own already, in quittance of all!"

"Well, and was n't it that same I 'm saying?" The McMurrough retorted. "If it were n't for that, and the bargain we 've struck d' you think that I 'd be letting my sister and a McMurrough look at the likes of you? No, not in as many midsummer days as are between this and world without end!"

The look Asgill shot at him would have made a wiser man tremble. But The McMurrough knew the strength of his position.

"And if I were to tell her?" Asgill said slowly.

"What?"

"That we 've made a bargain about her."

"It 's the last strand of hope you 'd be breaking, my man," the younger man answered briskly. "For you 'd lose my help, and she 'd not believe you — though every priest in Douai backed your word!"

Asgill knew that that was true, and he changed his tone. "Enough said," he replied pacifically. "Where 'll we be if we quarrel? You want the old place that is yours by right. And I want — your sister." He swallowed something as he named her; even his tone was different. "'T is one and one. That 's all."

"And you 're the one who wants the most," James replied cunningly. "Asgill, my man, you 'd give your soul for her, I 'm thinking."

"I would."

"You would, I believe," he continued, with a leer, "you 're that fond of her I 'll have to look to her! Hang me, my friend, if I let her be alone with you after this. Safe bind, safe bind. Women and fruit are easily bruised."

Asgill rose slowly to his feet. "You scoundrel!" he said in a low tone. And it was only when The McMurrough, surprised by his movement, turned to him, that the young man saw that his face was black with passion, so menacing, that he also sprang to his feet. "You scoundrel!" Asgill repeated, choking on the words. "If you say a thing like that again I 'll do you a mischief. Do you hear?"

"What in the saints' names is the matter with you?" The McMurrough faltered.

"You 're not fit to breathe the air she breathes!" Asgill continued, with the same ferocity. "Nor am I! But I know it. And you don't! Why, man," he continued, still fighting with the passion that possessed him, "I would n't dare to touch the hem of her gown without her leave. I would n't dare to look in her face if she bade me not! She 's as safe with me as if she were an angel in heaven! And you say — you; but you don't understand!"

"Faith and I don't," The McMurrough answered, his tone much lowered. "That 's true for you!"

"No," Asgill repeated. "But don't you talk like that again, or harm will come of it. I may be what you say, but I would n't lay a finger on your sister against her will — no, not to be in Paradise!"

"I thought you did n't believe in Paradise," the younger man muttered.

"There 's a Paradise I do believe in," Asgill answered. "But never mind that." He sat down again.

Strange to relate, he meant what he said. Asgill was as unscrupulous a man as the time in which he lived and the class from which he sprang could show. He had risen to his present station by crushing the weak and cajoling the strong, and he was prepared to maintain his ground by means as vile and a hand as hard. But he loved; and somewhere in the depths of his earthly nature a spark of good survived, and fired him with so pure an ardour that at the least hint of disrespect to his mistress, the whole man rose in arms.

"Enough of that!" Asgill repeated after a moment's pause. While he did not fear, it did not suit him to break with his companion. "And, indeed, it was not of your sister I was thinking when I said where 'd we be if we quarrelled. For it 's not I 'll be the cuckoo to push you out, McMurrough, lad. But a man there is will play the old gray bird yet, if you let him be. And him with the power and all."

"D' you mean John Sullivan?"

"I mean that same, my jewel."

The young man laughed derisively. "Pho!" he said, "you 'll be jesting. For the power, it 's but a name. If he were to use, were it but the thin end of it, it would run into his hand! The boys would rise upon him, and Flavvy 'd be the worst of them. It 's in the deep bog he 'd be, before he knew where he was, and never 'd he come out, Luke Asgill! Sure, I 'm not afraid of him!"

"You 've need to be!" Asgill said, soberly.

"Pho! It takes more than him to frighten me! Why, man, he 's a soft thing, if ever there was one! He 'll not say boh! to a goose with a pistol in its hand!"

"And that might be, if you were n't such a fool as ye are, McMurrough!" Asgill answered. "I say he might not harm you, if you had not the folly we both know of in your mind. But I tell you freely I 'll be no bonnet to it while he stands by. 'T is too dangerous. Not that I believe you are much in earnest, my lad. What 's your rightful king to you, or you to him, that you should risk aught? But whether you go into it out of pure devilment, or just to keep right with your sister ——"

"Which is why you stand bonnet for it," McMurrough struck in, with a grin.

"That 's possible. But I do that, my lad, because I hope naught may come of it, but just a drinking of healths and the like. So, why should I play the informer and get myself misliked? But you — you may find yourself deeper in it than you think, and quicker than you think, while all the time, if the truth were told" — with a shrewd look at the other — "I believe you 've little more heart for it than myself."

The young man swore a great oath that he was in it body and soul. But he laughed before the words were out of his mouth.

"I don't believe you," Asgill said, coolly. "You know, and I know, what you were ready to do when the old man was alive, and if it had paid you properly. You 'd do the same now, if it paid you. So what are the wrongs of the old faith to you that you should risk all for them? Or the rights of the old Irish, for the matter of that? This being so, I tell you, it is too dangerous a game to play for groats. While John Sullivan 's here, that makes it more dangerous. I 'll not play bonnet!"

"What 'll he know of it, at all, at all?" James McMurrough asked contemptuously.

"With a Spanish ship off the coast," Asgill answered. "and you know who likely to land, and a preaching, may be, next Sunday, and pike-drill at the Carraghalin to follow — man, in three days you may have smoking roof-trees, and 't will be too late to cry 'Hold!' Stop, I say, stop while you can, and before you 've all Kerry in a flame!"

James McMurrough turned with a start. "How did you know there was pike-drill?" he cried, sharply. "I did n't tell you."

"Hundreds know it."

"But you!" McMurrough retorted. It was plain that he was disagreeably surprised.

"Did you think I meant nothing when I said I played bonnet to it?"

"You know a heap too much, Luke Asgill!"

"And could make a good market of it?" Asgill answered, coolly. "That 's what you 're thinking. It 's heaven's truth I could — if you 'd not a sister."

"And a care for your own skin."

"Faith," Asgill answered with humorous frankness, "and I 'm plain with you, that stands for something. But that I 've not that in my mind — I 'm giving you proof, James McMurrough. Is n't it I am praying you to draw out of it in time, for all our sakes? If you mean nothing but to keep sweet with your sister, you 're playing with fire, and so am I! And for the rest, if you are fool enough to be in earnest, which I 'll never believe, you 've neither money, nor men, nor powder."

"You know a heap of things, Asgill," James McMurrough answered disdainfully.

"I do. And more by token, I know this!" Asgill retorted. He had risen to depart, and the two stood with their faces close together. "This!" he repeated, clapping one hand on the other. "If you 're a fool, I 'm a bigger. Or what would I be doing? Why, I 'd be pressing you into this, in place of holding you back! And then when the trouble came, and you 'd to quit, my lad, and no choice but to make work for the hangman or beg a crust over seas, and your sister 'd no more left than she stood up in, and small choice either, it 's then she 'd be glad to take Luke Asgill, as she 'll barely look at now! Ay, my lad, I 'd win her then, if it were but as the price of saving your neck! There 's naught she 'd not do for you, and I 'd ask but herself."

James McMurrough stared at him, confounded. For Asgill spoke with a bitterness as well as a vehemence that betrayed how little he cared for the man he addressed — whether he swung or lived, begged or famished. His tone, his manner, his black look all made it plain that the scheme he outlined was no sudden thought, but a plan long conceived, often studied, and put aside with reluctance. James shuddered, and his countenance changed. A creature of small vanities and small vices, worthless, selfish, and cruel, but as weak as water, he quailed before this view of a soul darker than his own. It was with a poor affectation of defiance that he made his answer.

"And what for, if it 's as easy as you say, don't you do it?" he stammered.

Asgill groaned. "Because — but there, you would n't understand! Still, if you must be knowing, there 's ways of winning would be worse than losing!"

The McMurrough's confidence began to return. "You 're grown scrupulous," he sneered, half in jest, half in earnest.

Asgill's answer flung him down again. "You may thank your stars I am!" he replied, with a look that scorched the other.

"Well — well," McMurrough made an effort to mutter — he was thoroughly disconcerted — "at any rate, I 'm obliged to you for your warning."

"You will be obliged to me," Asgill replied, resuming his ordinary manner, "if you take my warning as to the big matter; and also as to your kinsman, John Sullivan. For, I tell you, I 'm afraid of him."

"Of him?" James cried.

"Ay, of him. Have a care, have a care, man, or he 'll out-general you. See if he does n't poison your sister against you! See if he does not make this hearth too hot for you! As long as he 's in the house there 's danger. I know the sort," Asgill continued shrewdly, "and little by little, you 'll see, he 'll get possession of her — and it 's weak is your position as it is, my lad."

"Pho!"

"'T is not 'pho'! And in a week you 'll know it, and be as glad to see his back as I should be to-day!"

"What, a man who has not the spirit to go out with a gentleman!"

"A man, you mean," Asgill retorted, showing his greater shrewdness, "who has the spirit to say that he won't go out!"

"Sure, and I 've not much opinion of a man of that kind," McMurrough exclaimed.

"I have," Asgill replied. "I 'd not have played the trick about your sister 's mare, if I 'd known he 'd be here. It seemed the height of invention when you hit upon it, and no better way of commending myself. But I misdoubt it now. Suppose this Colonel brings her back?"

"But Payton 's stanch."

"Ah, I hold Payton, sure enough," Asgill answered, "in the hollow of my hand, James McMurrough. But there 's accident, and there 's what not, and if in place of my restoring the mare to your sister, John Sullivan restored her — faith, my lad, I 'd be laughing on the other side of my face. And if he told what I 'll be bound he knows of you, it would not suit you either!"

"It would not," The McMurrough replied, with an ugly look which the gloaming failed to mask. "It would not. But there 's small chance of that."

"Things happen," Asgill answered in a sombre tone. "Faith, my lad, the man 's a danger. D' you consider," he continued, his voice low, "that he 's owner of all — in law; and if he said the word, devil a penny there 'd be for you! And no marriage for your sister but with his good will."

McMurrough's face showed a shade paler through the dusk.

"What would you have me do?" he muttered.

"Quit this plan of a rising, and give him no handle. That, anyway."

"But that won't rid us of him?" McMurrough said, in a low voice.

"True for you. And I 'll be thinking about that same. He 's no footing yet, and if he vanished 't would be no more than if he 'd never come. See the light below? There! It 's gone. Well, that way he 'd go, and little more talk, if 't were well plotted."

"But how?" The McMurrough asked nervously.

"I will consider," Asgill answered.

CHAPTER VIII

AN AFTER-DINNER GAME

EASINESS, the failing of the old-world Irishman, had been Uncle Ulick's bane through life. It was easiness which had induced him to condone a baseness in his nephew which he would have been the first to condemn in a stranger. Again it was easiness which had beguiled him into standing idle while the brother's influence was creeping like strangling ivy over the girl's generous nature. But, above all, it was easiness which had induced Uncle Ulick to countenance in Flavia those romantic notions, now fast developing into full-blown plans, which he, who knew the strength of England and the weakness of Ireland, should have been the first to nip in the bud.

He had not nipped them. Instead, he had allowed the reckless patriotism of the young O'Beirnes, and the simulated enthusiasm — for simulated he knew it to be — of the young McMurrough to guide the politics of the house and to bring it to the verge of a crisis. For he, too, was Irish! He, too, felt his heart too large for his bosom when he dwelt on his country's wrongs. On him, too, though he knew that successful rebellion was out of the question, Flavia's generous indignation, her youth, her enthusiasm, wrought powerfully.

At this point had arrived John Sullivan, a man of experience. His very aspect sobered Uncle Ulick's mind. The latter saw that only a blacker and more hopeless night could follow the day of vengeance of which he dreamed; and he sat this evening — while Asgill talked on the hill with The McMurrough — and was sore troubled. Was it, or was it not, too late? Meanwhile, Flavia sat on a stool on the farther side of the blaze, brooding bitterly over the loss of her mare; and he knew that that incident would not make things more easy. For here was tyranny brought to an every-day level; oppression that pricked to the quick! But the cup was full and running over, and the oppressors should rue it! A short day, and they would find opposed to them the despair of a united people and an ancient faith. Something like this Flavia had been saying to him.

Then silence had fallen. And now he made answer.

"I 'm low at heart about it, none the less," he said. "War, my girl, is a very dreadful thing."

"And what is slavery?" she replied. There were red spots in her cheeks and her eyes shone.

"But if the yoke be made heavier, my jewel, and not lighter?"

"Then let us die!" she answered. "Let there be an end! But let us die free! As it is, do we not blush to own that we are Irish? Is not our race the handmaid among nations? What have we to live for? Our souls they will not leave us, our bodies they enslave, they take our goods! What is left, Uncle Ulick?" she continued, passionately.

"Just to endure," he said, sadly, "till better times. Or what if we make things worse? Believe me, Flavvy, the last rising ——"

"Rising!" she cried. "Rising! Why do you call it that? It was no rising! It was the English who rose, and we who remained faithful to our king. It was they who betrayed, and we who paid the penalty for treason!"

"Call it what you like, my dear," he answered, patiently, "'t is not forgotten."

"Nor forgiven!" she cried fiercely.

"True! But the spirit is broken in us. If it were not, we should have risen three years back, when the Scotch rose. There was a chance then. But for us by ourselves there is no chance and no hope."

"Uncle Ulick!" she answered, looking fixedly at him, "I know where you get that from! I know who has been talking to you, and who" — her voice trembled with anger — "has upset the house! It 's meet that one who has left the faith of his fathers, and turned his back on his country in her trouble should try to make others act as he has acted and be false as he has been false! Caring for nothing himself, cold, and heartless ——"

He was about to interrupt her, but on the word the door opened and her brother and Asgill entered. She dashed the tears from her eyes and was silent.

"Sure, and you 've got a fine colour, my girl," The McMurrough said. "Any news of the mare?" he continued, as he took the middle of the hearth and spread his skirts to the blaze. Then, as she shook her head despondently, "Bet you a hundred crowns to one, Asgill," he said, with a grin, "Cousin Sullivan don't recover her!"

"I could n't afford to take it," Asgill answered, smiling. "But if Miss Flavia had chosen me for her ambassador in place of him that 's gone ——"

"She might have had a better and could n't have had a worse!" James said, with a loud laugh. "It 's supper-time," he continued, after he had turned to the fire, and kicked the turfs together, "and late, too! Where 's Darby? There 's never anything but waiting in this house. I suppose you are not waiting for the mare? If you are, it 's empty insides we 'll all be having for a week of weeks."

"I 'm much afraid of that," Uncle Ulick answered, as the girl rose. Uncle Ulick could never do anything but fall in with the prevailing humour.

Flavia paused half-way across the floor and listened. "What 's that?" she asked, raising her hand for silence. "Did n't you hear something? I thought I heard a horse."

"You did n't hear a mare," her brother retorted, grinning. "In the meantime, miss, I 'd be having you know we 're hungry. And ——"

He stopped, startled by a knock on the door. The girl hesitated, then she stepped to it, and threw it wide. Confronting her across the threshold, looking ghostly against the dark background of the night, a gray horse threw up its head and, dazzled by the light, started back a pace — then blithered gently. Before the men had grasped the truth, Flavia had sprung across the threshold, her arms were round her favourite's neck, she was covering its soft muzzle with kisses.

"The saints defend us!" Uncle Ulick cried. "It is the mare!"

In his surprise The McMurrough forgot himself, his rôle, the company, and swore. Fortunately Uncle Ulick was engrossed in the scene at the door, and the girl was outside. Neither heard.

Asgill's mortification was a hundred times deeper, but his quicker brain had taken in the consequences on the instant, and he stood silent.

"She 's found her way back!" The McMurrough exclaimed, recovering himself.

"Ay, lad, that must be it," Uncle Ulick replied. "She 's got loose and found her way back to her stable, heaven be her bed! And them that took her are worse by the loss of five pounds!"

"Broken necks to them!" The McMurrough cried viciously.

At that moment the door which led to the back of the house and the offices opened, and Colonel John stepped in, a smile on his face. He laid his damp cloak on a bench, hung up his hat and whip, and nodded to Ulick.

"The Lord save us! Is it you 've brought her back?" the big man exclaimed.

The Colonel nodded. "I thought" — he looked toward the open door — "it would please her to find the creature so!"

The McMurrough stood speechless with mortification.

It was Asgill who stepped forward and spoke. "I give you joy, Colonel Sullivan," he said. "It is small chance I thought you had."

"I can believe you," the Colonel answered quietly. If he did not know much, he suspected a good deal.

Before more could be said, Flavia McMurrough turned herself about and came in and saw Colonel Sullivan. Her face flamed hotly as the words which she had just used about him recurred to her; she could almost have wished the mare away again if the obligation went with her. To owe the mare to him!

But the thing was done, and she found words at last. "I am very much obliged to you," she said, "if it was really you who brought her back."

"It was I who brought her back," he answered, hurt by her words and manner, but hiding the hurt. "You need not thank me, I did it very willingly."

She felt the meanness of her attitude, and "I do thank you!" she said, straining at warmth, but with poor success. "I am very grateful to you, Colonel Sullivan, for the service you have done me."

"But wish another had done it!" he answered, with the faintest tinge of reproach in his voice.

"No! But that you would serve another as effectively," she responded.

He did not see her drift. And "What other?" he asked.

"Your country," she replied, and went out into the night, to see that the mare was safely disposed.

The four men looked at one another, and Uncle Ulick shrugged his shoulders as much as to say, "We all know what women are!" Then, feeling a storm in the air, he spoke for the sake of speaking. "Well, James," he said, "she 's got her mare, and you 've lost your wager. It 's good-bye to the brandy, anyway. And, faith, it 'll be good news for the little French captain. John Sullivan, I give you joy. You 'll amend us all at this rate! Sure, and I begin to think you 're one of the Little People!"

"About the brandy," The McMurrough said curtly, "things are by way of being changed, I 'd have you know. I 'm not going to forego a good ship ——"

"No, no, a bet 's a bet," Uncle Ulick interposed, hurriedly. "Mr. Asgill was here, and ——"

"I 'm with you," Asgill said. "Colonel Sullivan's won the right to have his way, and it 's better so too, and safer. Faith, and I 'm glad."

"Well, it 's not I 'll tell O'Sullivan Og," James McMurrough retorted. "It 's little he 'll like to give up the stuff, and, in my opinion," he added sullenly, "there 's more than us will have a word to say to it before it 's given up. But you can judge of that for yourselves."

"Mr. Crosby, of Castlemaine ——"

"Oh! It 's little he 'll count in a week from this!"

"Still, no doubt Colonel Sullivan will arrange it," Asgill answered, smoothly. It was evident that he thought The McMurrough was saying too much. "Sure, he 's managed a harder thing."

There was a gleam in his eye and something sinister in the tone; but the words were hearty, and Colonel John made no demur. Darby, entering at that moment with a pair of lights in tall candlesticks — which were silver, but might have been copper — caused a welcome interruption. A couple of footboys, with slipshod feet and bare ankles, bore in the meats after him and slapped them down on the table; at the same moment the O'Beirnes and two or three more of the "family" entered from the back. Their coming lightened the air. Questions were asked: Where 'd the Colonel light on the cratur, and how 'd he persuade the rogues to give her up? Colonel John refused to say, but laughingly. The O'Beirnes and the others were in a good humour, pleased that the young mistress had recovered her favourite, and inclined to look more leniently on the Colonel. "Faith, and it 's clear that you 're a Sullivan!" quoth one. "There 's none like them to put the comether on man and beast!"

This was not much to the taste of The McMurrough or of Asgill, who, inwardly raging, saw the interloper founding a reputation on the ruse which they had devised for another end. It was abruptly and with an ill grace that the master of the house cut short the scene and bade all sit down if they wanted their meat.

"What are we waiting for?" he continued querulously. "Where 's the girl? Stop your jabbering, Martin! And Phelim ——"

"Sure, I believe the mare's got from her," Uncle Ulick cried. "I heard a horse, no farther back than this moment."

"I 'm wishing all horses in Purgatory," The McMurrough replied angrily. "And fools too! Where 's the wench gone? Anyway, I 'm beginning. You can bide her time if you like!"

And begin he did. The others, after looking expectantly at the door — for none dared treat Flavia as her brother treated her — and after Asgill had said something about waiting for her, fell to also, one by one. Presently the younger of the slipshod footboys let fall a dish and was cursed for awkwardness. Where was Darby? He also had vanished.

The claret began to go round. Still, neither Flavia nor the butler returned. By and by the Colonel — who felt that a cloud hung over the board as over his own spirits — saw, or fancied that he saw, an odd thing. The door — that which led to the back of the house — opened, as if the draught moved it; it remained open a space, then in a silent, ghostly fashion it fell to again. The Colonel laid down his knife, and Uncle Ulick, whose eyes had followed his, crossed himself. "That 's not lucky," the big man said. "The saints send it 's not the white horse of the O'Donoghues has whisked her off!"

"Don't be for saying such unchancy things, Mr. Sullivan!" Phelim answered, with a shiver. "What was it, at all, at all?"

"The door opened without a hand," Uncle Ulick explained. "I 'm fearing there 's something amiss."

"Not with this salmon," James McMurrough struck in contemptuously.

Uncle Ulick made no reply, and a moment later Darby entered, slid round the table to Uncle Ulick's side, and touched his shoulder. Whether he whispered a word or not Colonel John did not observe, but forthwith the big man rose and went out.

This time it was James McMurrough who laid down his knife. "What in the name of the Evil One is it?" he cried, in a temper. "Can't a man eat his meat in peace, but all the world must be tramping the floor?"

"Oh, whisht! whisht!" Darby muttered, in a peculiar tone.

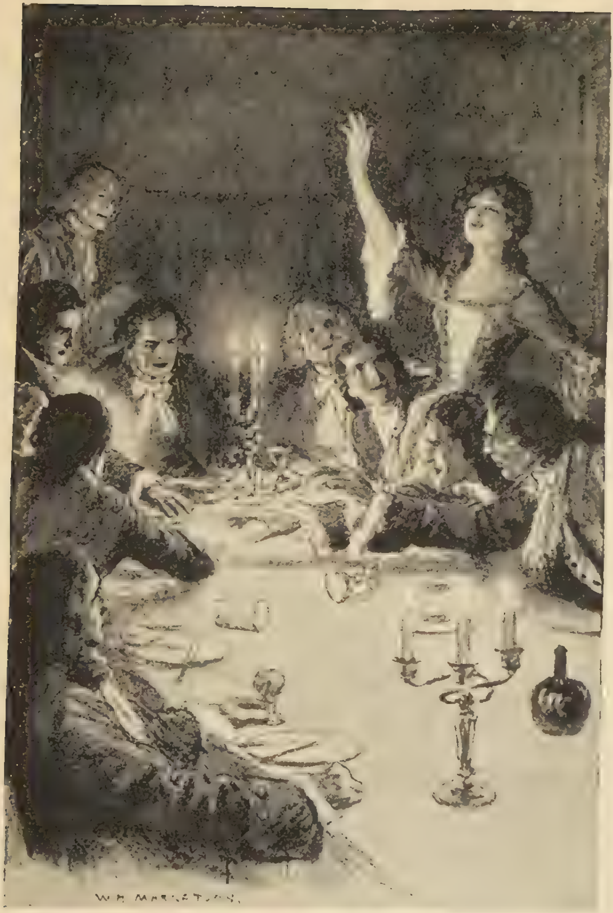
James leaped up. He was too angry to take a hint. "You old fool!" he cried, heedless of Asgill's hand, which was plucking at his skirts. "What is it? What do you mean with your 'whishts' and your nods? What ——"

But the old butler had turned his back on his master, and gone out in a panic. Fortunately at this moment Flavia showed at the door. "The fault 's mine, James," she said, in a clear, loud tone. And the Colonel saw that her colour was high and her eyes were dancing. "I could n't bear to leave her at once, the darling! That was it; and besides, I took a fear ——"

"The pastern 's right enough," Uncle Ulick struck in, entering behind her and closing the door with the air of a big man who does not mean to be trifled with. "Sound as your own light foot, my jewel, and sounder than James's head! Be easy, be easy, lad," he continued, with a trifle of sternness. "Sure, you 're spoiling other men's meat, and forgetting the Colonel's present, not to speak of Mr. Asgill, that, being a justice, is not used to our Kerry tantrums!"

Possibly this last was a hint, cunningly veiled. At any rate, The McMurrough took his seat again with a better grace than usual, and Asgill made haste to take up the talk. The Colonel reflected; nor did he find it the least odd thing that Flavia, who had been so full of distress at the loss of her mare, said little of the rescuer's adventures, nor much of the mare herself. Yet the girl's whole aspect was changed in the last hour. She seemed, as far as he could judge, to be in a state of the utmost excitement; she had shaken off the timidity which her brother's temper too often imposed on her, and with it her shyness before strangers. All the Irish humour in her fluttered to the surface, and her tongue ran with an incredible gaiety. Uncle Ulick, the O'Beirnes, the buckeens, laughed frank admiration — sometimes at remarks which the Colonel could not understand, sometimes at more obvious witticisms. Asgill was her slave. Darby, with the familiarity of the old servant, chuckled openly, and more than one dish rolled on the floor without drawing down a rebuke. Even her brother regarded her with unwilling amusement.

Could the change in her spring from the recovery of the mare, of which she said scarce a word? Colonel John could hardly believe it; and if such were the case, she was ungrateful, for the recoverer of her favourite she had no words, and scarce a look. Rather, it seemed to him that there must be two Flavias: the one shy, modest, and, where her country was not assailed, of a reserve beyond reproach; the other Flavia, a shoot of the old tree, a


W. H. MARGETSON

"'WHO LOVES ME, FOLLOWS ME! ACROSS THE WATER'"

hoyden, a castback to Sir Michael's wild youth and the gay days of the Restoration Court.

He listened to her drollery, her ringing laugh, her arch sayings, with some blame, but more admiration. Listening with a kindlier heart, he discerned that at her wildest and loudest Flavia did not suffer one light or unmaidenly word to pass her lips.

He gave her credit for that; and in the act he learned, with a reflection on his stupidity, that there was method in her madness; ay, and meaning — but he had not hitherto held the key to it — in her jests. On a sudden — he saw now that this was the climax to which she had been leading up — she sprang to her feet, carried away by her excitement. Erect, defiant — nay, triumphant — she flung her handkerchief into the middle of the table, strewn as it was with a medley of glasses and flasks and disordered dishes.

"Who loves me, follows me!" she cried, a queer exultation in her tone "across the water!"

They pounced on the kerchief like dogs let loose from the leash — every man but the astonished Colonel. For an instant the place was a pandemonium, a Babel. In a twinkling the kerchief was torn, amid cries of the wildest enthusiasm, into as many fragments as there were men round the table.

"All! — All!" she cried, still standing erect, and hounding them on with the magic of her voice, while her beautiful face blazed with excitement. "All — but you?" — with which, for the briefest space, she turned to Colonel

John. Her eyes met his. They asked him a defiant question: they challenged the answer.

"I do not understand," he replied, taken by surprise. But indeed he did understand only too well. "Is it a game?"

The men were pinning the white shreds on their coats above their hearts — even her brother, obedient for once. But at that word they turned as one man to him, turned flushed, frowning faces and passionate eyes on him. But Flavia was before them. "Yes, a game!" she cried, laughing, a note too high. "Don't you know the Lady's Kerchief?"

"No," he said soberly; he was even a little out of countenance.

"Then no more of it," Uncle Ulick cried, interposing, with a ring of authority in his voice. "For my part, I 'm for bed. Bed! We 're all children, bedad, and as fond of a frolic! And I 'm thinking I 'm the worst. The lights Darby, the lights, and pleasant dreams to you! After all—

"'The spoke that is to-day on top
To-morrow 's on the ground.'

Sure, and I 'll swear that 's true!"

"And no treason!" The McMurrough answered him, with a grin. "Eh, Asgill?"

And so between them they removed Colonel John's last doubt — if he had one.

CHAPTER IX

EARLY RISERS

IT WAS plain — whatever was obscure — that the play of the Lady's Kerchief was a cover for matter more serious. Those who had taken part in it had scarcely deigned to pretend. Colonel John had been duller than the dullest if he had not seen in the white shreds for which the men had scrambled, and which they had affixed with passion to their coats, the White Cockade of the Pretender; or found in Uncle Ulick's couplet —

"The spoke that is to-day on top
To-morrow 's on the ground"

one of those catchwords which suited the taste of the day, and served at once for a passport and a sentiment.

But Colonel John knew that many a word was said over the claret which meant less than nothing next morning; and that many a fair hand passed the wine across the water-bowl — the very movement did honour to a shapely arm — without its owner having the least intention of endangering those she loved for the sake of the King across the Water.

Consequently he knew that he might be wrong in dotting the i's and crossing the t's of the scene which he had witnessed. Such a scene might mean no more than a burst of high spirits: in nine cases out of ten it would not be followed by action, nor import more than that singing of "'T was a' for our rightful King!" which had startled him on his arrival. In that house, in the wilds of Kerry, sheer loyalty could not be expected. The wrongs of the nation were too recent, the high seas were too near, the wild geese came and went too freely — wild geese of another feather than his. Such outbursts as he had witnessed were no more than the safety-valves of outraged pride.

Colonel John leaned upon such arguments; and, disappointed and alarmed as he was by Flavia's behaviour, he told himself that nothing was seriously meant, and that with the morning light things would look more cheerful.

But when he awoke, after a feverish and disturbed sleep, the faint grisly dawn that entered the room was not of a character to inspirit. He turned on his side to sleep again; but in the act he discovered that the curtain which he had drawn across the window was withdrawn. He could discern the dark mass of his clothes piled on a chair, of his hat clinging like some black bat to the whitewashed wall, of his valise and saddle-bags in the corner — finally of a stout figure bent, listening, at the door.

An old campaigner, Colonel John was not easily surprised. Repressing the exclamation on his lips, he rose to his elbow and waited until the figure at the door straightened itself, and, turning toward him, became recognizable as Uncle Ulick. The big man crossed the floor, saw that he was awake, and, finger on lip, enjoined silence. Then he pointed to the clothes on the chair, and brought his mouth near the Colonel's ear.

"The back-door!" he whispered. "Under the yews in the garden! Come!" And leaving the Colonel staring and mystified, he crept from the room with a stealth and lightness remarkable in one so big. The door closed, the latch fell, and made no sound.

Colonel John reflected that Uncle Ulick was no romantic young person to play at mystery for effect. There was a call for secrecy, therefore. The O'Beirnes slept in a room divided from his only by a thin partition; and to gain the stairs he must pass the doors of other chambers, all inhabited. As softly as he could, and as quickly, he dressed himself. He took his boots in his hand; his sword, perhaps from old habit, under his other arm; in this guise he crept from the room and down the dusky staircase. Old Darby and an underling were snoring in the cub, which in the daytime passed for a pantry, and both by day and by night gave forth a smell of sour corks and mice; but Colonel John slid by the open door as noiselessly as a shadow, found the back-door — which led to the fold-yard — on the latch, and stepped out into the cool, dark morning, into the sobering freshness and the clean, rain-washed air.

The grass was still gray-hued, the world still colourless and mysterious, the house a long black bulk against a slowly lightening sky.

Colonel John paused on the doorstep to draw on his boots, then he picked his way delicately to the leather-hung wicket that broke the hedge which served for a fence to the garden. On the right of the wicket a row of tall Florence yews, set within the hedge, screened the pleasaunce, such as it was, from the house. Under the lee of these he found Uncle Ulick striding to and fro and biting his finger-nails in his impatience.

He wrung the Colonel's hand and looked into his face. "You 'll do me the justice, John Sullivan," he said, with a touch of passion, "that never in my life have I been over-hasty? Eh? Will you do me that?"

"Certainly, Ulick," Colonel John answered, wondering much what was coming.

"And that I 'm no coward, where it 's not a question of trouble?"

"I 'll do you that justice, too," the Colonel answered. He smiled at the reservation.

The big man did not smile. "Then you 'll take my word for it," he replied, "that I 'm not speaking idly when I say you must go."

Colonel John lifted his eyebrows. "Go?" he answered. "Do you mean now?"

"Ay, now, or before noon!" Uncle Ulick retorted. "More by token," he continued with bitterness, "it 's not that you might go on the instant that I 've brought you out of our own house as if we were a couple of rapparees or horse-thieves, but that you might hear it from me who wish you well, instead of from those who may be 'll not put it so kindly, nor be so wishful for you to be taking the warning they give."

"Is it Flavia you 're meaning?"

"No; and don't you be thinking it," Uncle Ulick replied with a touch of heat. "Nor the least bit of it, John Sullivan! The girl, God bless her, is as honest as the day, if ——"

"If she 's not very wise!" Colonel John said, smiling.

"You may put it that way if you please. For the matter of that, you 'll be thinking she 's not the only fool at Morristown, nor the oldest, nor the biggest. But the blood must run slow, and the breast be cold, that sees the way the Saxons are mocking us and locks the tongue in silence. And sure, there 's no more to be said, but just this — that there 's those here you 'll be wise not to see! And you 'll get a hint to that end before the sun 's high."

"And you 'd have me take it?"

"You 'd be mad not to take it!" Uncle Ulick replied, frowning. "Is n't it for that I 'm out of my warm bed, and the mist not off the lake?"

"You 'd have me give way to them and go?"

"Faith and I would!"

"Would you do that same yourself, Ulick?"

"For certain."

"And be sorry for it afterward!"

"Not the least taste in life!" Uncle Ulick asseverated.

"And be sorry for it afterward," Colonel John repeated quietly. "Kinsman, come here," he continued, with unusual gravity. And taking Uncle Ulick by the arm he led him to the end of the garden, where the walk looked on the lake and bore some likeness to a roughly made terrace. Pausing where the black masses of the Florence yews, most funereal of trees, still sheltered their forms from the house, he stood silent. Here and there on the slopes which faced them a cotter's hovel stood solitary in its potato patch or its plot of oats. In more than one place three or four cottages made up a tiny hamlet, from which the smoke would presently rise. To English eyes, the scene, these oases in the limitless brown of the bog, had been wild and rude; but to Colonel John it spoke of peace and safety and comfort, and even of a narrow plenty. The soft Irish air lapped it, the distances were mellow, memories of boyhood rounded off all that was unsightly or cold.

He pointed here and there with his hand, and with seeming irrelevance. "You 'd be sorry afterward," he said, "for you 'd think of this, Ulick. God forbid I should deny that even for this too high a price may be paid. But if you play this away in wantonness — if that which you are all planning come about, and you fail, as they failed in Scotland three years back, it is of this, it is of the women and the children under these roofs that will go up in smoke, that you 'll be thinking, Ulick, at the last! Believe me or not, this is the last thing you 'll see! It 's to a burden as well as an honour you 're born where men doff caps to you; and it 's that burden will lie the black weight on your soul at the last. There 's old Darby and O'Sullivan Og's wife — and Pat Mahony and Judy Mahony's four sons, and the three Sullivans at the landing, and Phil the crowder and the seven tenants at Killabogue — it 's of them, it 's of them" — as he spoke his finger moved from hovel to hovel — "and their like I 'm thinking. You cry them and they follow, for they 're your folks born. But what do they know of England or England's strength, or what is against them, or the certain end? They think, poor souls, because they land their spirits and pay no dues, and the justices look the other way — they think the black Protestants are afraid of them! While you and I, you and I know, Ulick," he continued, dropping his voice, "'t is because we lie so poor and distant and small, they give no heed to us! We know! And that 's our burden."

The big man's face worked. He threw out his arms. "God help us!" he cried.

"He will, in His day! I tell you again, as I told you the hour I came, I, who have followed the wars for twenty years, there is no deed that has not its reward when the time is ripe, nor a cold hearth that is not paid for a hundredfold!"

Uncle Ulick looked sombrely over the lake. "I shall never see it," he said. "Notwithstanding, I 'll do what I can to quiet them — if it be not too late."

"Too late?"

"Ay, too late, John. But anyway, I 'll be minding what you say. On the other hand, you must go, and this very day that ever is."

"There are some here that I must not be seeing?" Colonel John said, shrewdly.

"That 's it."

"And if I do not go, Ulick? What then, man?"

"Whisht! Whisht!" the big man cried in unmistakable distress. "Don't say the word! Don't say the word, John, dear."

"But I must say it," Colonel John answered, smiling. "To be plain, Ulick, here I am and here I stay. They wish me gone because I am in the way of their plans. Well, and can you give me a better reason for staying?"

What argument Ulick would have used, what he was opening his mouth to say, remains unknown. Before he could reply the murmur of a voice near at hand startled them both. Uncle Ulick's face fell, and the two turned with a single movement to see who came.

They discerned, in the shadow of the wall of yew, two men, who had just passed through the wicket into the garden.

The strangers saw them at the same moment, and were equally taken by surprise. The foremost of the two, a sturdy, weather-beaten man, with a square, stern face and a look of power, laid his hand on his cutlass — he wore a broad blade in place of the usual rapier. The other, whom every line of his shaven face, as well as his dress, proclaimed a priest — and perhaps more than a priest — crossed himself and muttered something to his companion. Then he came forward.

"You take the air early, gentlemen," he said, the French accent very plain in his speech, "as we do. If I mistake not," he continued, looking with an easy smile at Colonel John, "your Protestant kinsman, of whom you told me, Mr. Sullivan? I did not look to meet you, Colonel Sullivan; but I do not doubt you are man of the world enough to excuse, if you cannot approve, the presence of the shepherd among his sheep. The law forbids, but ——" still smiling, he finished the sentence with a gesture in the air.

"I approve all men," Colonel John answered, quietly, "who are in their duty, father."

"But wool and wine that pay no duty?" the priest replied, turning with a humorous look to his companion, who stood beside him unsmiling. "I 'm not sure that Colonel Sullivan extends the same indulgence to free-traders, Captain Machin."

Colonel John looked closely at the man thus brought to his notice. Then he raised his hat courteously. "Sir," he said, "the guests of the Sullivans, whoever they be, are sacred to the Sullivans."

Uncle Ulick's eyes had met the priest's, as eyes meet in a moment of suspense. At this he drew a deep breath of relief. "Well said," he muttered. "Bedad, it is something to have seen the world!"

"You have served under the King of Sweden, I believe?" the ecclesiastic continued, addressing Colonel John with a polite air. He held a book of offices in his hand, as if his purpose in the garden had been merely to read the service.

"Yes."

"A great school of war, I am told?"

"It may be called so. But I interrupt you, father, and with your permission I will bid you good morning. Doubtless we shall meet again."

"At breakfast, I trust," the ecclesiastic answered, with a certain air of intention. Then he bowed and they returned it, and the two pairs gave place to one another with ceremony, Colonel John and Ulick passing out through the garden wicket, while the strangers moved on toward the walk which looked over the lake. Here they began to pace up and down.

With his hand on the house door Uncle Ulick made a last attempt. "For God's sake, be easy and go," he muttered, his voice unsteady, his eyes fixed on the other's, as if he would read his mind. "Leave us to our fate! You cannot save us — you see what you see, you know what it means. And for what I know, you know the man. You 'll but make our end the blacker."

"And the girl?"

Uncle Ulick tossed his hands in the air. "God help her!" he said.

"Shall not we too help her?"

"We cannot."

"It may be. Still, let us do our duty," Colonel John replied. He was very grave. Things were worse, the plot was thicker, than he had feared.

Uncle Ulick groaned. "You 'll not be bidden?" he said.

"Not by an angel," Colonel John answered steadfastly. "And I 've seen none this morning, but only a good man whose one fault in life is to answer to all men 'Sure, and I will!'"

Uncle Ulick started as if the words stung him. "You make a jest of it!" he said. "Heaven send we do not sorrow for your wilfulness. For my part, I 've small hope of that same." He opened the door, and, turning his back upon his companion, went heavily, and without any attempt at concealment, past the pantry and up the stairs to his room.

To answer "Yes" to all comers and all demands is doubtless, in the language of Uncle Ulick, a mighty convenience and a great softener of the angles of life. But a time comes to the most easy when he must answer "No," or go open-eyed to ruin. Then he finds that, from long disuse, the word will not shape itself; or, if uttered, it is taken for naught. That time had come for Uncle Ulick. Years ago his age and experience had sufficed to curb the hot blood about him. But he had been too easy to dictate while he might, and to-day he must go the young folks' way, seeing all too plainly the end of it.

But Colonel John was of another kind and another mind. Often in the Swedish wars had he seen a fair country-side changed in one day into a waste, from the recesses of which naked creatures with wolfish eyes stole out at night, maddened by their wrongs, to wreak a horrid vengeance on the passing soldier. He knew that the fairest parts of Ireland had undergone such a fate within living memory. Therefore he was firmly minded, as one man could be, that not again should the corner of Kerry under his eyes, the corner he loved, the corner entrusted to him, suffer that fate.

Yet, when he descended to breakfast, his face told no tale of his thoughts, and he greeted with a smile the unusual brightness of the morning. Nor, as he sunned himself and inhaled with enjoyment the freshness of the air, did any sign escape him that he marked a change.

But he was not blind. Among the cripples and vagrants who lounged about the entrance he detected six or eight ragged fellows whose sunburnt faces were new to him and who certainly were not cripples. In the doorway of one of the two towers that fronted him across the court stood O'Sullivan Og, whittling a stick and chatting with a sturdy idler in seafaring clothes. The Colonel could not give his reason, but he had not looked twice at these two before he got a notion that there was more in that tower this morning than the old ploughs and the broken boat which commonly filled the ground floor, or the grain which was stored above. Powder? Treasure? He could not say which or what; but he felt that the open door was a mask that deceived no one.

And there was a stir, there was a bustle in the court; a sparkle in the eyes of some as they glanced slyly and under their lashes at the house, a lilt in the tread of others as they stepped to and fro. Some strange change had fallen upon Morristown, and imbued it with life.

He caught the sound of voices in the house, and he turned about and entered. The priest and Captain Machin had descended and were standing with Uncle Ulick warming themselves before the wood fire. The McMurrough, the O'Beirnes, and two or three strangers —

grim-looking men who had followed, a glance told him, the trade he had followed — formed a group a little apart, yet near enough to be addressed. Asgill was not present, nor Flavia.

"Good morning, again," Colonel John said. And he bowed.

"With all my heart, Colonel Sullivan," the priest answered cordially. And Colonel John saw that he had guessed aright: the speaker no longer took the trouble to hide his episcopal cross and chain, or the ring on his finger. There was an increase of dignity, too, in his manner. His very cordiality seemed a condescension.

Captain Machin bowed silently, while The McMurrough and the O'Beirnes looked darkly at the Colonel. They did not understand: it was plain that they were not in the secret of the morning encounter.

"I see O'Sullivan Og is here," the Colonel said, addressing Uncle Ulick. "That will be very convenient."

"Convenient?" Uncle Ulick repeated, looking blank.

"We can give him the orders as to the Frenchman's cargo," the Colonel said, calmly.

Uncle Ulick winced. "Ay, to be sure! To be sure, lad," he answered. But he rubbed his head, like a man in a difficulty.

The Bishop seemed to be going to ask a question. Before he could speak, however, Flavia came tripping down the stairs, a gay song on her lips. Half way down, the song, light and sweet as a bird's, came to a sudden end.

"I am afraid I am late!" she said. And then — as the Colonel supposed — she saw that more than the family party were assembled: that the Bishop and Captain Machin were there also, and the strangers — and, above all, that he was there. She descended the last three stairs silently, but with a heightened colour, moved proudly into the middle of the group, and curtsied before the ecclesiastic till her knee touched the floor.

He gave her his hand to kiss, with a smile and a murmured blessing. She rose with sparkling eyes.

"It is a good morning!" she said, as one who having done her duty could be cheerful.

"It is a very fine morning," the Bishop answered in the same spirit. "The sun shines on us, as we would have him shine. And after breakfast, with your leave, my daughter, and your brother's leave, we will hold a little council. What say you, Colonel Sullivan?" he continued, turning to the Colonel. "A family council? Will you join us?"

The McMurrough uttered an exclamation, so unexpected and strident, that the words were not articulate. But the Bishop understood them, for, as all turned to him, "Nay," he said, "it shall be for the Colonel to say. But it's ill arguing with a fasting man," he continued genially, "and by your leave we will return to the matter after breakfast!"

"I am not for argument at all," Captain Machin said. It was the first time he had spoken.

CHAPTER X

A COUNCIL OF WAR

THE meal had been eaten, stolidly by some, by others with a poor appetite, by Colonel John with a thoughtful face. Two men of family, but broken fortunes, old Sir Donny McCarthy of Dingle, and Timothy Burke of Maamtrasna, had joined the party—under the rose, as it were, and neither giving nor receiving a welcome. Now old Darby kept the door and the Bishop the hearth; whence, standing with his back to the glowing peat, he could address his audience with eye and voice. The others, risen from the table, had placed themselves here and there where they pleased. The courtyard, visible through the windows, seethed with an ever-increasing crew of peasantry, frieze-coated or half bare, who whooped and jabbered, now about one of their number, now about another. The Irish air was soft, the hum of voices cheerful; nor could anything less like a secret council, less like a meeting of men about to commit themselves to a dark and dangerous enterprise, be well imagined.

But no one was deceived. The courage, the enthusiasm, that danced in Flavia's eyes were reflected more darkly and more furtively in a score of faces, within the room and without. To enjoy one hour of triumph, to wreak upon the cursed English a tithe of the wrongs, a tithe of the insults, that their country had suffered, to be the spoke on top, were it but for a day, to die for Ireland if they could not live for her. Could man own Irish blood, and an Irish name, and not rise at the call?

If there were such a man, oh! cowardly, mean, and miserable he seemed to Flavia McMurrough. Much she marvelled at the patience, the consideration, the arguments which the silver-tongued ecclesiastic brought to bear upon him. She longed to denounce him, to bid him begone, and do his worst.

But she was a young plotter, and he who spoke from the middle of the hearth with so much patience and forbearance was an old one, proved by years of peril, and tempered by a score of failures; a man long accustomed to play with the lives and fortunes of men. He knew better than she what was at stake to win or lose; nor was it without forethought that he had determined to risk much to gain Colonel Sullivan. To his mind, and to Machin's mind, the other men in the room were but tools to be used, puppets to be danced. But this man — for among soldiers of fortune there is a camaraderie, so that they are known to one another by repute from the Baltic to Cadiz — was a coadjutor to be gained. He was one whose experience, joined with an Irish name, might well avail them much.

Colonel John might refuse, he might be obdurate. But in that event the Bishop's mind was made up. Flavia supposed that, if the Colonel held out he would be dismissed, and so an end. But the speaker made no mistake. He had chosen to grip the nettle danger, and he knew that gentle measures were no longer possible. He must enlist Colonel Sullivan, or — but it has been said that he was no novice in dealing with the lives of men.

"If it be a question only of the chances," he said, after some beating about the bush, "if I am right in supposing that it is only that which withholds Colonel Sullivan from joining us ——"

"I do not say it is," Colonel John replied very gravely, "But to deal with it on that basis: while I can admire. reverend sir, the man who is ready to set his life on a desperate hazard to gain something which he sets above that life, I take the case to be different where it is a question of the lives of others. Then I say the chances must be weighed."

"However sacred the cause and high the aim?"

"I think so."

The Bishop sighed, his chin sinking on his breast. "I am sorry," he said, "I am sorry."

"That we cannot see alike in a matter so grave? Yes, sir, so am I."

"No. That I met you this morning."

"I am not sorry," Colonel John replied, stoutly refusing to see the other's meaning. "For — hear me out, I beg. You and I have seen the world and can weigh the chances. Your friend, too, Captain Machin" — he pronounced the name in an odd tone — "he too knows on what he is embarked and how he will stand if the result be failure. It may be that he already has his home, his rank, and his fortune in foreign parts, and will be little the worse if the worst befall."

"I?" Machin cried, stung out of his taciturnity. "Let me tell you, sir, that I fling back the insinuation!"

But the Colonel proceeded as if the other were not speaking. "You, reverend sir, yourself," he continued, "know well on what you are embarking, its prospects, and the issue for you if it fail. But you are by your profession and choice devoted to a life of danger. You are willing, day by day and hour by hour, to run the risk of death. But these, my cousin there" — looking with a kind eye at Flavia — "she ——"

"Leave me out!" she cried, passionately. And she rose to her feet, her face on fire. "I separate myself from you! I, for my part, ask no better than to suffer for my country!"

"She thinks she knows, but she does not know," the Colonel continued quietly, unmoved by her words. "She cannot guess what it is to be cast adrift — alone, a woman, penniless, in a strange land. And yet that at the best — and the worst may be unspeakably worse — must be her fate if this plot miscarry! For others, The McMurrough and his friends yonder" — he indicated the group by the window — "they also are ignorant."

The McMurrough sprang to his feet, spluttering with rage. "Speak for yourself!" he cried

"They know nothing," the Colonel continued, quite unmoved, "of that force against which they are asked to pit themselves, of that stolid power over sea, never more powerful than now!"

"The saints will be between us and harm!" the eldest of the O'Beirnes cried, rising in his wrath. "It 's speak for yourself I say too!"

"And I!"

"And I!" others of the group roared with gestures of defiance.

One, stepping forward, snapped his fingers close to the Colonel's face. "That for you! — that for you!" he cried. "Now, or whenever you will, day or night, and sword or pistol! To the devil with your impudence, sir; I 'd have you know you 're not the only man has seen the world. The shame of the world on you, talking like a schoolmaster while your country cries for you, and 't is not your tongue but your hand she 's wanting!"

Uncle Ulick put his big form between Colonel John and his assailant. "Sure and be easy!" he said. "Sir Donny, you 're forgetting yourself! And you, Tim Burke! Be easy, I say. It 's only for himself the Colonel's speaking!"

"Thank God for that!" Flavia cried in a voice which rang high.

They were round him now, a ring of men with dark, angry faces, and hardly restrained hands. But the Bishop intervened.

"One moment," he said, still speaking smoothly and with a smile. "Perhaps it is for those he thinks he speaks!" And the Bishop pointed to the crowd which filled the forecourt. "Perhaps it is for those he thinks he speaks!" he repeated in irony — for of the feeling of the crowd there could be no doubt.

Colonel John replied, "It is on their behalf I appeal to you. For it is they who foresee the least, and they who will suffer the most. It is they who will follow like sheep, and they who like sheep will go to the butcher! Ay, it is they," he continued with deeper feeling, and he turned to Flavia, "who are yours, and they will pay for you. Therefore," raising his hands for silence, "before you name the prize, sum up the cost! Your country, your faith, your race — there are great things, but they are far off and can do without you. But these — these are that fragment of your country, that handful of your race which God has laid in the palm of your hand, to cherish or to crush, and ——"

"The devil!" Machin ejaculated with sudden violence. Perhaps he read in the girl's face some shadow of perplexity. "Have done with your preaching, sir, I say! Have done, man. If we fail ——"

"You must fail!" Colonel John retorted. "You will fail! And failing, sir, his reverence will stand no worse than now, for his life is forfeit already! While you ——"

"What of me? Well, what of me?" the stout man cried truculently. His brows descended over his eyes, and his lips twitched.

"For you, Admiral Cammock ——"

The other stepped forward a pace. "You know me?"

"Yes, I know you."

There was silence for an instant, while those who were in the secret eyed Colonel Sullivan askance, and those who were not gaped at Cammock.

Soldiers of fortune, of fame and name, were plentiful in those days, but seamen of equal note were few. And with this man's name the world had lately rung. An Irishman, he had risen high in Queen Anne's service; but at her death, incited by his devotion to the Stuarts, he had made a move for them at a critical moment. He had been broken, being already a notable man; on which he had entered the Spanish marine, and been advanced to a position of rank and power. In Ireland his life was forfeit, Great Britain counted him renegade and traitor. So that to find himself recognized, though grateful to his vanity, was a shock to his discretion.

"Well, and knowing me?" he replied at last, with the tail of his eyes on the Bishop, as if he would gladly gain a hint from his subtlety. "What of me?"

"You have your home, your rank, your relations abroad," Colonel Sullivan answered firmly. "If a descent on the coast be a part of your scheme, then you do not share the peril equally with us. We shall suffer, while you sail away."

"I fling that in your teeth!" Cammock cried. "I know you too, sir, and ——"

"Know no worse of me than of yourself!" Colonel Sullivan retorted. "But if you do indeed know me, you know that I am not one to stand by and see my friends led blindfold to certain ruin. It may suit your plans to make a diversion here. But that diversion is a part of larger schemes, and the fate of those who make it is little to you."

Cammock's hand flew to his belt, he took a step forward, his face suffused with passion. "For half as much I have cut a man down!" he cried.

"May be, but ——"

"Peace, peace, my friends," the Bishop interposed. He laid a warning hand on Cammock's arm. "This gentleman," he continued smoothly, "thinks he speaks for our friends outside."

"Let me speak, not for them, but *to* them," Colonel Sullivan replied impulsively. "Let me tell them what I think of this scheme, of its chances, of its certain end!"

He moved, whether he thought they would let him or not, toward the window. But he had not taken three steps before he found his progress barred. "What is this?" he exclaimed.

"Needs must with so impulsive a gentleman," the Bishop said. He had not moved, but at a signal from him The McMurrough, the O'Beirnes and two of the other young men had thrust themselves forward. "You must give up your sword, Colonel Sullivan," he continued.

The Colonel retreated a pace, and evinced more surprise than he felt. "Give up — do you mean that I am a prisoner?" he cried. He had not drawn, but two or three of the young men had done so, and Flavia, in the background by the fire was white as paper — so suddenly had the shadow of violence fallen on the room.

"You must surrender!" the Bishop repeated firmly.

He too was a trifle pale, but he was used to such scenes and he spoke with decision. "Resistance is vain. I hope that with this lady in the room ——"

"One moment!" the Colonel cried, raising his hand. But as The McMurrough and the others hesitated, he whipped out his sword and stepped two paces to one side with an agility no one had foreseen. He now had the table behind him and Uncle Ulick on his left hand. "One moment!" he repeated, raising his hand in deprecation and keeping his point lowered. "Do you consider ——"

"We consider our own safety," Cammock answered grimly. And signing to one of the men to join Darby at the door, he drew his cutlass. "You know too much to go free, sir, that is certain."

"Ay, faith, you do," The McMurrough chimed in with a sort of glee. "He was at Tralee yesterday, no less. We 'll have the garrison here before the time!"

"But by the powers," Uncle Ulick cried, "ye shall not hurt him! Your reverence!" — the big man's voice shook — "your reverence, this shall not be! It 's not in this house they shall murder him, and him a Sullivan! Flavia! Speak, girl," he continued, the perspiration standing on his brow. "Say ye 'll not have it. After all, it 's your house! There shall be no Sullivan blood spilt in it while I am standing by to prevent it!"

"Then let him give up his sword!" Cammock answered doggedly.

"Yes, let him give up his sword," Flavia said in a small voice.

"Colonel Sullivan," the Bishop interposed, stepping forward, "I hope you 'll hear reason. Resistance is vain. Give up your sword and ——"

"And *presto!*" Cammock cried, "or take the consequences!" He had edged his way, while the Bishop spoke, round Ulick and round the head of the table. Now, with his foot on the bench, he was ready at a word to spring on the table, and take the Colonel in the rear. It was clear that he was a man of action. "Down with your sword, sir," he cried, flatly.

Colonel John recognized the weakness of his position. Before him the young men were five to one, with old Sir Donny and Timothy Burke in the rear. On his flank the help which Ulick might give was discounted by the move Cammock had made. He saw that he could do no more at present. Suddenly as the storm had blown up, he knew that he was dealing with desperate men, who from this day onward would act with their necks in a noose, and whom his word might send to the scaffold. They had but to denounce him to the rabble who waited outside, and, besides the Bishop, one only there, as he believed, would have the influence to save him.

Colonel John had confronted danger many times; to confront it had been his trade. And it was with coolness and a clear perception of the position that he turned to Flavia. "I will give up my sword," he said, "but to my cousin only. This is her house, and I yield myself" — with a smile and a bow — "her prisoner."

Before they knew what he would be at, he stepped forward and tendered his hilt to the girl, who took it with flaccid fingers. "I am in your hands now," he said, fixing his eyes on hers and endeavouring to convey his meaning to her. For surely, with such a face, she must have, with all her recklessness, some womanliness, some tenderness of feeling in her.

"Hang your impudence!" The McMurrough cried.

"A truce, a truce," the Bishop interposed. "We are all agreed that Colonel Sullivan knows too much to go free. He must be secured," he continued smoothly, "for his own sake. Will two of these gentlemen see him to his room, and see also that his servant is placed under guard in another room?"

"But," the Colonel objected, looking at Flavia, "my cousin will surely allow me to give ——"

"She will be guided by us in this," the Bishop rejoined with asperity. "Let what I have said be done."

Flavia, very pale, holding the Colonel's sword as if it might sting her, did not speak. Colonel Sullivan, after a moment's hesitation, followed one of the O'Beirnes from the room, the other bringing up the rear.

When the door had closed upon them, Flavia's was not the only pale face in the room. The scene had brought home to more than one the fact that here was an end of peace and law, and a beginning of violence and rebellion. The majority, secretly uneasy, put on a reckless air to cover their apprehensions. The Bishop and Cammock, though they saw themselves in a fair way to do what they had come to do, looked thoughtful. Only Flavia, shaking off the remembrance of Colonel John's face and Colonel John's existence, closed her grip upon his sword, and in the ardour of her patriotism saw with her mind's eye not victory nor acclaiming thousands, but the scaffold, and a death for her country. Sweet it seemed to her to die for the cause, for the faith, to die for Ireland!

True, her country, her Ireland, was but this little corner of Kerry beaten by the Atlantic storms and sad with the wailing cries of seagulls. But if she knew no more of Ireland than this, she had read her story; and naught is more true than that the land the most downtrodden is also the best beloved. Wrongs beget a passion of affection; and from oppression springs sacrifice. This daughter of the windswept shore, of the misty hills and fairy glens, whose life from infancy had been bare and rugged and solitary, had become, for that reason, a dreamer of dreams and a worshipper of the ideal Ireland, her country, her faith. The salt breeze that lashed her cheeks and tore at her hair, the peat reek and the soft shadows of the bogland — ay, and many an hour of lonely communing — had filled her breast with such love as impels rather to suffering and to sacrifice than to enjoyment.

For one moment she had recoiled before the shock of impending violence. But that had passed; now her one thought, as she stood with dilated eyes, unconsciously clutching the Colonel's sword, was that the time was come, the thing was begun — henceforth she belonged not to herself, but to Ireland and to God.

Deep in such thoughts, the girl was not aware that the others had got together and were discussing the Colonel's fate until mention was made of the French sloop and of Captain Augustin. "Faith, and let him go in that!" she heard Uncle Ulick urging. "D' ye hear me, your reverence? 'T will be a week before they land him, and the fire we 'll be lighting will be no secret at all at all by then."

"May be, Mr. Sullivan," the Bishop replied—"may be. But we cannot spare the sloop."

"No, we 'll not spare her!" The McMurrough chimed in. "She 's heels to her, and it 's a godsend she 'll be to us if things go ill."

"An addition to our fleet, anyway," Cammock said. "We 'd be mad to let her go — just to make a man safe; we can make safe a deal cheaper!"

Flavia propped the sword carefully in an angle of the hearth, and moved forward. "But I do not understand," she said timidly. "We agreed that the sloop and the cargo were to go free if Colonel Sullivan — but you know!" she added, breaking off and addressing her brother.

"I it dreaming you are?" he retorted, contemptuously. "Is it we 'll be taking note of that now?"

"It was a debt of honour," she said.

"The girl 's right," Uncle Ulick said, "and we 'll be rid of him."

"We 'll be rid of him without that," The McMurrough muttered.

"I am fearing, Mr. Sullivan," the Bishop said, "that it is not quite understood by all that we are embarked upon a matter of life and death. We cannot let bagatelles stand in the way. The sloop and her cargo can be made good to her owners — at another time. For your relative and his servant ——"

"The shortest way with them!" some one cried. "That 's the best and the surest!"

"For them," the Bishop continued, silencing the interruption by a look, "we must not forget that some days must pass before we can hope to get our people together. During the interval we lie at the mercy of an informer. Your own people you know, but the same cannot be said of this gentleman — who has very fixed ideas — and his servant. Our lives and the lives of others are in their hands, and it is of the last importance that they be kept secure and silent."

"Ay, silent 's the word," Cammock growled.

"There could be no better place than one of the towers," The McMurrough suggested, "for keeping them safe, bedad!"

"And why 'll they be safer there than in the house?" Uncle Ulick asked suspiciously. He looked from one speaker to another with a baffled face, trying to read their minds. He was sure that they meant more than they said.

"Oh, for the good reason!" the young man returned contemptuously. "Is n't all the world passing the door upstairs? And what more easy than to open it?"

Cammock's eyes met the Bishop's. "The tower 'll be best," he said. "Draw off the people, and let them be taken there, and a guard set. We 've matters of more importance to discuss now. This gathering to-morrow, to raise the country — what 's the time fixed for it?"

But Flavia, who had listened with a face of perplexity, interposed. "Still, he is my prisoner, is he not?" she said wistfully. "And if I answer for him?"

"By your leave, ma'am," Cammock replied, with decision, "one word. Women to women's work! I 'll let no woman weave a halter for me!"

The room echoed low applause. And Flavia was silent.

CHAPTER XI

A MESSAGE FOR THE YOUNG MASTER

JAMES McMURROUGH cared little for his country, and nothing for his Faith. He cared only for himself; and but for the resentment which the provisions of his grandfather's will had bred in him, he would have seen the Irish race in Purgatory, and the Roman faith in a worse place, before he would have risked a finger to right the one or restore the other.

Once embarked, however, on the enterprise, vanity swept him onward. The night which followed Colonel Sullivan's arrest was a night long remembered at Morristown — a night to uplift the sanguine and to kindle the short-sighted, nor was it a wonder that the young chief — as he strode among his admiring tenants, his presence greeted with Irish acclamations, and his skirts kissed by devoted kernes — sniffed the pleasing incense, and trod the ground to the measure of imagined music. The triumph that was never to be intoxicated him.

His people had kindled a huge bonfire in the middle of the forecourt, and beside this he extended a gracious welcome to a crowd of strong tenants. A second fire, for the comfort of the baser sort, had been kindled outside the gates, and was the centre of merriment less restrained;

while a third, which served as a beacon to the valley, and a proclamation of what was being done, glowed on the platform before the ruined tower at the head of the lake. From this last the red flames streamed far across the water; and now revealed a belated boat shooting from the shadow, now a troop of countrymen, who, led by their priest, came limping along the lakeside, ostensibly to join in the services of the morrow, but in reality to hear something and to do something toward freeing old Ireland and shaking off the grip of the cursed Saxon.

In the more settled parts of the land, such a summons as had brought them from their rude shielings among the hills would have passed for a dark jest. But in this remote spot the notion of overthrowing the hated power by means of a few score pikes did not seem preposterous, either to these poor folk or to their betters. Cammock, of course, knew the truth, and the Bishop.

But the native gentry saw nothing hopeless in the plan. That plan was first to fall upon Tralee in combination with a couple of sloops said to be lying in Galway Bay; and afterward to surprise Kenmare. Masters of these places, they proposed to raise the old standard, to call Connaught to their aid, to cry a crusade. And faith, as Sir Donny said, before the Castle tyrants could open their eyes, or raise their heads from the pillow, they 'd be seeing themselves driven into the salt ocean!

So, while the house walls gave back the ruddy glare of the torches, and the barefooted, bareheaded, laughing colleens damped the thatch, and men confessed in one corner and kissed their girls in another, and the smiths in a third wrought hard at the pike-heads — so the struggle depicted itself to more than one!

And all the time Cammock and the Bishop walked in the dark in the garden, a little apart from the turmoil, and, wrapped in their cloaks, talked in low voices; debating much of Sicily and Naples and the Cardinal and the Mediterranean fleet, and at times laughing at some court story. But they said, strange to tell, no word of Tralee, or of Kenmare, or of Dublin Castle, or even of Connaught. They were no visionaries. They had to do with greater things than these, and in doing them knew that they must spend to gain. The lives of a few score peasants, the ruin of half a dozen hamlets, what were these beside the diversion of a single squadron from the great pitched fight, already foreseen, where the excess of one battleship might win an empire, and its absence might ruin nations?

And one other man, and one only, because his life had been passed on their wider plane, and he could judge of the relative value of Connaught and Kent, divined the trend of their thoughts, and understood the deliberation with which they prepared to sacrifice their pawns.

Colonel Sullivan sat in the upper room of one of the two towers that flanked the entrance to the forecourt. Bale was with him, and the two, with the door doubly locked upon them and guarded by a sentry whose crooning they could hear, shared such comfort as a pitcher of water and a gloomy outlook afforded. The darkness hid the medley of odds and ends which littered their prison; but the inner of the two slit-like windows that lighted the room admitted a thin shaft of firelight that, dancing among the uncovered rafters, told of the orgy below. Bale, staring morosely at the crowd about the fire, crouched in the splay of the window, while the Colonel, in the same posture at the other window, gazed with feelings not more cheerful on the dark lake.

He was concerned for himself and his companion. But he was more gravely concerned for those whose advocate he had made himself — for the ignorant cotters in their lowly hovels, the women, the children, upon whom the inevitable punishment would fall. He doubted, now that it was too late, the wisdom of the course he had taken; and, blaming himself for precipitation, he fancied that if he had acted with a little more guile, a little less haste, his remonstrance might have had greater weight.

William Bale, as was natural, thought more of his own position. "May the fire burn them!" he muttered, his ire excited by some prank of the party below. "The Turks were polite beside these barefoot devils!"

"You 'd have said the other thing at Bender," the Colonel answered, turning his head.

"Ay, your honour," Bale returned; "a man never knows when he is well off."

His master laughed. "I 'd have you apply that now," he said.

"So I would if it were n't that I 've a kind of a scunner at those black bog-holes," Bale said. "To be planted head first 's no proper end of a man, to my thinking;

and if there 's not something of the kind in these ragamuffins' minds I 'm precious mistaken."

"Pooh, man, you 're frightening yourself," the Colonel answered. But the room was dank and chill, the lake without lay lonely, and the picture which Bale's words called up was not pleasant to the bravest. "It 's a civilized land, and they 'd not think of it!"

"There 's one, and that 's the young lady's brother," Bale answered darkly, "would not pull us out by the feet! I 'll swear to that. Your honour 's too much in his way, if what they say in the house is true."

"Pooh!" the Colonel answered again. "We 're of one blood."

"Cain and Abel," Bale said. "There 's example for it." And he chuckled.

The Colonel scolded him anew. But having done so he could not shake off the impression which the man's words had made on him. While he lived he was a constant and an irritating check upon James McMurrough. If the young man saw a chance of getting rid of that check, was he one to put it from him? Colonel John's face grew long as he pondered the question; he had seen enough of James to feel considerable doubt about the answer. The fire on the height above the lake had died down, the one on the strand was a bed of red ashes. The lake lay buried in darkness, from which at intervals the cry of an owl as it moused along the shore rose mournfully.

But Colonel John was not one to give way to fears that might be baseless. "Let us sleep," he said, shrugging his shoulders. He lay down where he was, pillowing his head on a fishing-net. Bale said nothing, but examined the door before he stretched himself across the threshold.

Half an hour after dawn they were roused. It was a heavy trampling on the stairs that awakened them. The door was quickly unlocked, it was thrown open, and the hairy face of O'Sullivan Og, who held it wide, looked in. Behind him were two of the boys with pikes — frowsy, savage, repellent figures, with drugget coats tied by the sleeves about their necks.

"You 'll be coming with us, Colonel, no less," Og said.

Colonel John looked at him. "Whither, my man?" he asked coolly. He and Bale had got to their feet at the first alarm.

"Och, sure, where it will be best for you," Og replied, with a leer.

"Both of us?" the Colonel asked, in the same hard tone.

"Faith, and why 'd we be separating you, I 'd be asking."

Colonel John liked neither the man's tone nor his looks. But he was far above starting at shadows, and he guessed that resistance would be useless. "Very good," he said. "Lead on."

"Bedad, and if you 'll be doing that same, we will," O'Sullivan Og answered, with a grin.

The Colonel and Bale found their hats — they 'd been allowed to bring nothing else with them — and they went down the stairs. In the gloom before the door of the tower waited two sturdy fellows, barefoot and shock-headed, with musquetoons on their shoulders, who seemed to be expecting them. Round the smouldering embers of the fire a score of figures lay sleeping in the open, wrapped in their frieze coats. The sun was not yet up, and all things were wrapped in a mist that chilled to the bone. Nothing in all that was visible took from the ominous aspect of the two men with the firearms. One for each, Bale thought. And his face, always pallid, showed livid in the morning light.

Without a word the four men formed up round their prisoners, and at once O'Sullivan Og led the way at a brisk pace toward the gate. Colonel John was following, but he had not taken three steps before a thought struck him, and he halted. "Are we leaving the house at once?" he asked.

"We are. And why not, I 'm asking."

"Only that I 've a message for the McMurrough it will be well for him to have."

"Sure," O'Sullivan Og answered, his manner half wheedling, half truculent, "'t is no time for messages and trifles and the like now, Colonel. No time at all, I tell you. Ye can see that for yourself, I 'm thinking, such a morning as this."

"I 'm thinking nothing of the kind," the Colonel answered, and he hung back, looking toward the house. Fortunately Darby chose that minute to appear at the door. The butler's face was pale, and showed fatigue; his hair hung in wisps; his clothes were ill-fastened. He threw a glance of contempt at the sleeping figures lying here and there in the wet. Thence his eyes travelled on and took in the group by the gate. He started, and wrung his hands in sudden, irrepressible distress. It was as if a spasm seized the man.

The Colonel called him. "Darby," he cried. "Come here, my man."

O'Sullivan Og opened his mouth; he was on the point of interposing, but he thought better of it, and shrugged his shoulders, muttering something in the Erse.

"Darby," the Colonel said, gravely, "I 've a message for the young master, and it must be given him in his bed. Will you give it?"

"I will, your honour."

"You will not fail?"

"I will not, your honour," the old servant answered earnestly.

"Tell him, then, that Colonel Sullivan made his will as he passed through Paris, and 't is now in Dublin. You mind me, Darby?"

The old man began to shake — he had an Irishman's superstition. "I do, your honour. But the saints be between us and harm," he continued, with the same gesture of distress. "Who 's speaking of wills?"

"Only tell him that in his bed," Colonel John repeated, with an urgent look. "That is all."

"And by your leave, it is now we 'll be going," Og interposed sharply. "We are late already for what we 've to do."

"There are some things," the Colonel replied with a steady look, "which it is well to be late about."

Then, without further remonstrance, he and Bale, with their guard, marched out through the gate, and took the road along the lake — that same road by which the Colonel had come some days before from the French sloop. The men with the firelocks walked beside them, one on either flank, while the pikeman guarded them behind, and O'Sullivan Og brought up the rear.

They had not taken twenty paces before the fog swallowed up the party; and henceforth they walked in a sea of mist, like men moving in a nightmare from which they cannot awake. The clammy vapour chilled them to the bone; while the unceasing wailing of seagulls, borne off the lough, the whistle of an unseen curlew on the hillside, the hurtle of wings as some ghostly bird swept over them — these were sounds to depress men who had reason to suspect that they were being led to a treacherous end.

The Colonel, though he masked his apprehensions under an impenetrable firmness, began to fear no less than that — and with cause. He observed that O'Sullivan Og's followers were of the lowest type of kerne, islanders in all probability, and half starved; men whose hands were never far from their skenes, and whose one orderly instinct consisted in a blind obedience to their chief. O'Sullivan Og himself he believed to be The McMurrough's agent in his more lawless business; a fierce, unscrupulous man, prospering on his lack of scruple. The Colonel could augur nothing but ill from the hands to which he had been entrusted; and worse from the manner in which these savage, half-naked creatures, shambling beside him, stole from time to time a glance at him, as if they fancied they saw the winding-sheet high on his breast.

Some, so placed, and feeling themselves helpless, isolated by the fog, and entirely at these men's mercy, might have lost their firmness. But he did not; nor did Bale, though the servant's face betrayed the keenness of his anxiety. They weighed indeed the chances of escape: such chances as a headlong rush into the fog might afford to unarmed men, uncertain where they were. But the Colonel reflected that it was possible that that was the very course upon which O'Sullivan Og counted for a pretext. And, for a second objection, the two could not, so closely were they guarded, communicate with each other.

After all, The McMurrough's plan might amount to no more than their detention in some secret place among the hills. Colonel John hoped so.

He could not but think ill of things; of O'Sullivan Og's silence, of the men's stealthy glances, of the uncanny hour. And when they came presently to a point where a faintly marked track left the road, and the party, at a word from their leader, turned into it, he thought worse of the matter. Was it his fancy — he was far from nervous — or were the men beginning to look impatiently at one another? Was it his fancy, or were they beginning to press more closely on their prisoners, as if they sought a quarrel? He imagined that he read in one man's eyes the question "When?" and in another's the question "Now?" And a third, he thought, handled his weapon in an ominous fashion.

Colonel John was a brave man, inured to danger, one who had faced death in many forms. But the lack of arms shakes the bravest, and it needed even his nerve to confront without a quiver the fate that, if his fears were justified, lay before them: the sudden, violent death, and the black bog-water which would swallow all traces of the crime. But he did not lose his firmness or lower his crest for a moment.

By and by the track, which for a time had ascended, began to run downward. The path grew less sound. The mist, which was thicker than before, and shut them in on the spot where they walked, as in a world desolate and apart, allowed nothing to be seen in front; but now and again a ragged thorn tree or a furze bush, dripping with moisture, showed ghostlike to right or left. There was nothing to indicate the point they were approaching, or how far they were likely to travel; until the Colonel, peering keenly before them, caught the gleam of water. It was gone as soon as seen, the mist falling again like a curtain; but he had seen it, and he looked back to see what Og was doing. He caught him also in the act of looking over his shoulder. Was he making sure that they were beyond the chance of interruption?

It might be so; and Colonel John wheeled about quickly, thinking that while O'Sullivan Og's attention was directed elsewhere, he might take one of the other men by surprise, seize his weapon and make a fight for his life and his servant's life. But he met only sinister looks, eyes that watched his smallest movement with suspicion, a point ready levelled to strike him if he budged. And then, out of the mist before them, loomed the gaunt figure of a man walking apace toward them.

The meeting appeared to be as little expected by the stranger as by Og's party. For not only did he spring aside and leave the track to give them a wider berth, but he went by warily, with his feet in the bog. Some word was cried to him in the Erse; he answered, for a moment he appeared to be going to stop. Then he passed on and was lost in the mist.

But he left a change behind him. One of the fire-lock men broke into hasty speech, glancing, the Colonel noticed, at him and Bale, as if they were the subjects of his words. O'Sullivan Og answered the man curtly and harshly; but before the reply was off his lips a second man broke in vehemently in support of the other. They all halted; for a few seconds all spoke at once. Then, just as Colonel John was beginning to hope that they would quarrel, O'Sullivan Og gave way with sullen reluctance, and a man ran back the way they had come, shouting a name. Before the prisoners could decide whether his absence afforded a chance of escape, he was back again, and with him the man who had passed in the bog.

Colonel John looked at the stranger, and recognized him; and, a man of quick wit, he knew on the instant that he had to face the worst. His face set more hard, more firm — if it turned also a shade paler. He addressed his companion. "They 've called him back to confess us," he muttered in Bale's ear.

"The devils!" Bale exclaimed. He choked on the word and worked his jaw, glaring at them; but he said no more. Only his eyes glanced from one to another, wild and full of rage.

Colonel John did not reply, for already O'Sullivan Og was addressing him. "There 's no more to it," The McMurrough's agent said, bluntly, "but you 've come your last journey, Colonel, and we 'll go back wanting you. There 's no room in Ireland from this day for them that 's not Irish at heart! Nor safety for honest men while you 're walking the sod. But ——"

"Will you murder us?" Colonel John said. "Do you know, man," he continued, sternly, "what you do? What have we done to you, or your master?"

"Done?" O'Sullivan Og answered with sudden ferocity. "And murder, say you? Ay, faith, I would, and ten thousand like you, for the sake of old Ireland! You may make your peace, and have five minutes to that — and no more, for time presses, and we 've work to do. These fools would have a priest for you" — he turned and spat on the ground — "but it is I, and none better, know you are Protestants, and 't would take more than that to make your souls!"

Colonel John looked at him with a strange light in his eyes. "It is little to you," he said, "and much to me. Yet think, think, man, what you do. Or if you will not, here is my servant. Spare his life at least. Put him, if you please, on board the French sloop that 's in the bay ——"

"Faith, and you 're wasting the little breath that is left you," the ruffian answered, irritated rather than moved by the other's calmness. "It 's to take or leave. I told the men a heretic had no soul to make, but ——"

"God forgive you!" Colonel John said, and was silent; for he saw that remonstrance would not help him, nor prayer avail. The man's mind was made up, his heart steeled. For a brief instant, something, perhaps that human fear which he had so often defied, clutched Colonel John's heart. For a brief instant human weakness had its way with him, and he shuddered — in the face of the bog, in the face of such an end as this. Then the gracious faith that was his returned to him: he was his grave, unyielding self again. He took Bale's hand and begged his forgiveness. "Would I had never brought you!" he said. "Why did I, why did I? Yet, God's will be done!"

Bale did not seem able to speak. His jaw continued to work, while his eyes looked sideways at Og. Had the Irishman known his man, he would have put himself out of reach, armed as he was.

"But I will appeal for you to the priest!" Colonel John continued; "he may yet prevail with them to spare you."

"He will not!" O'Sullivan Og said, naïvely.

CHAPTER XII

THE SEA MIST

FATHER O'HARA looked at the two prisoners, and the tears ran down his face. He was the man whom Colonel Sullivan and Bale had overtaken on their way to Tralee. He was a merciful man and with all his heart he wished that, if he could do no good, God had been pleased to send him another way through the mist.

"What can I do?" he cried. "Oh, what can I do?"

"You can do nothing, father," O'Sullivan Og said grimly. "They 're heretics, no less! And we 're wasting your time, blessed man." He whispered a few words in the priest's ear.

The latter shuddered. "God forgive us all!" he wailed. "And most, those who need it most! God keep us from high place!"

"Sure and we 're in little peril!" O'Sullivan Og replied.

Colonel John looked at the priest with solemn eyes. Nor did aught but a tiny pulse beating in his cheek betray that he was listening, watching, ready to seize the least chance, that he might save, at any rate, poor Bale. Then "You are a Christian, father," he said gravely. "I ask nothing for myself. But this is my servant. He knows nothing. Prevail with them to spare him!"

Bale uttered a fierce remonstrance. No one understood it, or what he said, or meant. His eyes looked askance, like the eyes of a beast in a snare — seeking a weapon, or a throat! To be butchered thus!

Perhaps Colonel John, notwithstanding his calm courage, had the same thought, and found it bitter. Death had been good in the face of silent thousands, with pride and high resolve for cheer. But here in the mist, unknown, unnoticed, to perish and be forgotten in a week, even by the savage hands that took their breath! Perhaps to face this he, too, had need of all his Christian stoicism.

"My God! My God!" the priest said. "Have pity on these two, and soften the hearts of their murderers!"

"Amen," said Colonel John, quietly.

"Faith, and 't is idle, this," O'Sullivan Og cried, irritably. He gave a secret sign to his men to draw to one side and be ready. "We 've our orders, and other work to do. Kneel aside, father, 't is no harm we mean you. But you 're wasting breath on these same. And you," he continued, addressing the two, "say what prayer you will, if you know one, and then kneel or stand — it 's all one to us — and, God willing, you 'll be in purgatory and never a knowledge of it!"

"One moment," Colonel John interposed, his face pale but composed, "I have something to say to my friend."

"And you may, if you 'll play no tricks."

"If you would spare him ——"

"'T is idle, I say! Sorra a bit of good is it! But there, ye shall be having while the blessed man says three Paternosters, and not the least taste of time beyond!"

Colonel John made a sign to the priest, who, bowing himself on the wet sod, covered his eyes with his hand and began to pray. The men, at a sign from O'Sullivan, had drawn to either side, and the fire-lockmen were handling their pieces, with one eye on their leader and one on the prisoners.

Colonel John took Bale's hand. "What matter, soon or late?" he said, gently. "Here or on our beds we die in our duty. Let us say, *In manus tuas* ——"

"Popish! Popish!" Bale muttered, shaking his head. He spoke hoarsely, his tongue cleaving to his mouth. His eyes were full of rage.

"Into Thy Hands!" Colonel John said. He stooped nearer to his man's ear. "When I shout, jump and run!" he breathed. "I will hold two." Again he lifted his head and looked calmly at the threatening figures standing about them, gaunt and dark, against the curtain of mist. They were waiting for the signal. The priest was half way through his second Paternoster. His trembling tongue was stumbling, lagging more and more. As he ended it — the two men still standing hand in hand — Colonel John gripped Bale's fingers hard, but held him.

"What is that?" he cried, in a loud voice — but still he held Bale tight that he might not move. "What *is* that?" he repeated. On the ear — on his ear first — had fallen the sound of hurrying feet.

They strained their eyes through the mist.

"And what 'll this be?" O'Sullivan Og muttered suspiciously. "If you budge a step," he growled, "I 'll drive this pike ——"

"A messenger from The McMurrough," Colonel John said. If he was human, if his heart, at the hope of respite, beat upon his ribs as the heart of a worse man might have beaten, he did not betray it save by a light in his eyes.

They had not to wait. A tall, lathy form emerged from the mist. It advanced with long leaps, the way they had come. A moment, and the messenger saw them, pulled up, and walked the intervening distance, his arms drooping, and his breath coming in gasps. He had run apace, and he could not speak. But he nodded — as he wiped the saliva from his parted lips — to O'Sullivan Og to come aside with him; and the two moved off a space. The others eyed them while the message was given. The suspense was short. Quickly O'Sullivan Og came back.

"Ye may be thankful," he said, drily. "Ye 've cheated the pikes for this time, no less, and 't is safe ye are."

"You have the greater reason to be thankful," Colonel John replied solemnly. "You have been spared a foul crime."

"Faith and I hope I may never do worse," Og answered, hardily, "than rid the world of two black Protestants, an' them with a priest to make their souls! Many 's the honest man 's closed his eyes without that same. But 't is no time for prating! I wonder at your honour, and you no more than out of the black water! Bring them along, boys," he continued, "we 've work to do yet!"

"*Laus Deo!*" the priest cried, lifting up his hands. "Give Him the glory!"

"Amen," the Colonel said softly. And for a moment he shut his eyes and stood with clasped hands. "I thank you kindly, father, for your prayers!" he said. "The words of a good man avail much!"

No more was said. For a few yards Bale walked unsteadily. But he recovered himself and, urged by O'Sullivan's continual injunctions to hasten, the party were not long in retracing their steps. They reached the road, and went along it, but in the direction of the landing-place. In a few minutes they were threading their way in single file across the saucer-like waste which lay to landward of the hill overlooking the jetty.

"Are you taking us to the French sloop?" Colonel John asked.

"You 'll be as wise as the lave of us by and by!" Og answered sulkily.

They crossed the shoulder near the tower, and strode down the slope to the stone pier. The mist lay low on the water. The tide was almost at the flood. Og bade the men draw in one of the boats, ordered Colonel Sullivan and Bale to go into the bow, and the pikemen to take the oars. He and the two fire-lock men took their seats in the stern.

"Pull out, you cripples," he said, "and there 'll be flood enough to be bringing us back."

The men bent to the clumsy oars, and the boat slid down the inlet, and passed under the beam of the French sloop, which lay moored farther along the jetty. Not a sign of life appeared on deck as they passed; the ship seemed to be deserted. Half a dozen strokes carried the boat beyond view of it, and the little party were alone on the bosom of the water, that lay rocking smoothly between its unseen banks. Some minutes were spent in stout rowing, and soon the boat began to rise and fall on the Atlantic rollers.

" 'T is more deceitful than a pretty colleen," O'Sullivan Og said, "is the sea-fog, bad cess to it! My own father was lost in it. Will you be seeing her, boys?"

"Ye 'll not see her till ye touch her!" one of the rowers answered.

"And the tide running?" the other said. "Save us from that same!"

"She 's farther out by three gunshots!" struck in a fire-lock man. "We 'll be drifting back, ye thieves of the world, if ye sit staring there! Pull, an' we 'll be inshore an' ye know it."

For some minutes the men pulled steadily onward, while one of the passengers, apprized that their destination was the Spanish war-vessel, felt anything but eager to reach it. A Spanish warship meant imprisonment, possibly the Inquisition, persecution, and death. When the men lay at last on their oars, and swore that they must have passed the ship, he alone listened indifferently.

"'T is a black Protestant fog!" O'Sullivan cried. "Where 'll we be, I wonder?"

"Sure, ye can make no mistake," one answered. "The wind 's light off the land."

"We 'll be pulling back, lads."

"That 's the word."

The men put the boat about, and started on the return journey. Suddenly Colonel John, crouching in the bow, where was scant room for Bale and himself, saw a large shape loom before him. Involuntarily he uttered a warning cry, O'Sullivan echoed it, the men tried to hold the boat. In doing this, however, one man was quicker than the other, the boat turned broadside on to her former course, and before the cry was well off O'Sullivan Og's lips, it swept violently athwart a cable hauled taut by the weight of a vessel straining to the flow of the tide. In a twinkling the boat careened, throwing its occupants into the water.

Colonel John and Bale were nearest to the hawser, and managed to seize it and cling to it. But the first wave washed over them, blinding them and choking them; and, warned by this, they worked themselves along the rope until they could twist a leg over their slender support.

That effected, they shouted for help. But their shouts were merged in the wail of despair, of shrieks and cries, that floated away into the mist. The boat, travelling with the last of the tide, had struck the cable with force, and was already drifting a gunshot away. Whether any saved themselves on it, the two clinging to the hawser could not see.

Bale, shivering and scared, would have shouted again, but Colonel John stayed him. "God rest their souls!" he said solemnly. "The men aboard can do nothing. By the time they 'll have lowered a boat it will be done with these."

"They can take us aboard," Bale said.

"Ay, if we want to go to Cadiz gaol," Colonel John answered slowly. He was peering keenly toward the land.

"But what can we do, your honour?" Bale asked with a shiver.

"Swim ashore."

"God forbid!"

"But you can swim?"

"Not that far. Not near that far, God knows!" Bale repeated with emphasis, his teeth chattering. "I 'll go down like a stone."

"Cadiz gaol! Cadiz gaol!" Colonel John muttered. "Is n't it worth a swim to escape that?"

"Ay, ay, but ——"

"Do you see that oar drifting? In a twinkling it will be out of reach. Off with your boots, man, off with your clothes, and to it! That oar is freedom! The tide is with us still, or it would not be moving that way. But let the tide turn and we cannot do it."

"It 's too far!"

"If you could see the shore," Colonel John argued, "you 'd think nothing of it! With your chin on that oar, you can't sink. But it must be done before we are chilled."

He was stripping himself to his underclothes while he talked: and in haste, fearing that he might feel the hawser slacken and dip — a sign that the tide had turned. Already Colonel John had plans and hopes, but freedom was needful if they were to come to anything.

"Come!" he cried, impulsively. "Man, you are not a coward. Come!"

He let himself into the water and after a moment of hesitation Bale followed his example, let the rope go, and with quick, nervous strokes bobbed after him in the direction of the oar. Colonel John deserved the less credit, as he was the better swimmer. He swam long and slow with his head low, and his eyes watched his follower. A half minute of violent exertion, and Bale 's outstretched hand clutched the oar. It was a thick, clumsy implement, and it floated high. Colonel John bade him rest his hands on it, and thrust it before him lengthwise, swimming with his feet.

For five minutes nothing was said, but they proceeded slowly and patiently, trusting — for they could see nothing — that the tide was still seconding their efforts. Colonel John knew that if the shore lay, as he judged, about half a mile distant, he must, to reach it, swim slowly and reserve his strength. Though a natural desire to decide the question quickly would have impelled him to great exertion, he resisted it. At the worst, he reflected that the oar would support them both for a short time.

They had been swimming for ten minutes, as he calculated, when Bale, who floated higher, cried joyfully that he could see the land. Colonel John made no answer, he needed all his breath. But a minute later he too saw it loom low through the fog; and then, in some minutes afterward, they felt bottom and waded on to a ledge of rocks which projected a hundred yards from the mainland eastward of the mouth of the inlet. The tide had served them well by carrying them a little to the eastward. They sat a moment on the rocks to recover their strength; and then, stung to action by the chill wind, which set their teeth chattering, they got to their feet and scrambled painfully along the rocks until they reached the marshy bank of the inlet. A pilgrimage scarcely less painful, through gorse and rushes, brought them at the end of ten minutes to the jetty.

Here all was quiet. If any of O'Sullivan Og's party had saved themselves they were not to be seen, nor was there any indication that the accident was known on shore.

While Colonel John had been picking his way, his thoughts had not been idle; and now, without hesitation, he made along the jetty until the masts of the French sloop loomed beside it. He boarded the vessel by a plank and looked round him. There was no watch on deck, but a melancholy voice piping a French song rose from the depths of the cabin. Colonel John bade Bale follow him — they were shivering from head to foot — and descended the companion.

The singer was Captain Augustin. He lay on his back in his bunk, while his mate, between sleep and waking, formed an unwilling audience.

"Tout mal chaussé, tout mal vêtu,"

sang the Captain in a doleful voice,

"Pauvre marin, d'oùreviens-tu?
Tout doux! Tout doux."

With the last word on his lips, he called on the name of his Maker, for he saw two half-naked, dripping figures peering at him through the open door. For the moment he took them, by the dim light for the revenants of drowned men; while his mate, a Breton, rose on his elbow and shrieked aloud.

It was only when Colonel John called them by name that they were reassured, lost their fears, and recognized in the pallid figures before them their late passenger and his attendant. Then the cabin rang with oaths and invocations, with *mon Dieu!* and *ma foi!* Immediately clothes were fetched, and rough cloths to dry the visitors and restore warmth to their limbs, and cognac and food — for the two were half starved. While these comforts were being administered, and half the crew, crouching about the companion, listened, Colonel John told very shortly the tale of their adventures, of the fate that had menaced them, and their narrow escape. In return he learned that the Frenchmen were virtually prisoners.

"They have taken our equipage, cursed dogs!" Augusti explained, refraining with difficulty from a dance of rage. The rudder, the sails, they are not, see you? They have locked all in the house on shore, that we may not go by night, you understand. And by day the ship of war beyond, Spanish it is possible, pirate for certain, goes about to sink us if we move! Ah, *sacré nom*, that I had never seen this land of swine!"

"Have they a guard over the rudder and the sails?" Colonel John asked.

"I know not. What matter?"

"If not, it were not hard to regain them," Colonel John said, with an odd light in his eyes.

"And the ship of war beyond? What would she be doing?"

"While the fog lies?" Colonel John replied. "Nothing."

"The fog?" Augustin exclaimed. He clapped his hand to his head, ran up the companion and as quickly returned. "There is a fog," he cried, "like the inside of Jonah's whale! For the ship beyond I snap the finger at her! She is not! Then forward, *mes braves!* Yet tranquil! They have taken the arms!"

"Ay?" Colonel John said, still eating. "Is that so? Then it seems to me we must retake them. That first."

"What, you?" Augustin exclaimed.

"Why not?" Colonel John responded, looking round him, a twinkle in his eye. "The goods of his host are in a manner of speaking the house of his host. And it is the duty — as I said once before."

"But is it not that they are — of your kin?"

"That is the reason," Colonel John answered cryptically and to the skipper's surprise. But that surprise lasted a very short time. "Listen to me," the Colonel continued. "This goes farther than you think, and to cure it we must not stop short. Let me speak, and do you, my friends, listen. Courage, and I will give you not only freedom but a good bargain."

The skipper stared. "How so?" he asked.

Then Colonel John unfolded the plan on which he had been meditating while the gorse bushes pricked his feet and the stones gibed them. It was a great plan, and before all things a bold one; so bold that the seamen, who crowded the foot of the companion, opened their eyes.

Augustin smacked his lips. "It is what you call *magnifique!*" he said. "But," he shrugged his shoulders, "it is not possible!"

"If the fog holds?"

"But if it — what you call — lifts? What then, eh?"

"Through how many storms have you ridden?" the Colonel answered. "Yet if the mast had gone?"

"We had gone! *Vraiment!*"

"That did not keep you ashore."

Augustin cogitated over this for a while. Then, "But we are eight only," he objected. "Myself, nine."

"And two are eleven," Colonel John replied.

"We do not know the ground."

"I do."

The skipper shrugged his shoulders.

"And they have treated you — but you know how they have treated you," Colonel John went on, appealing to the lower motive.

The group of seamen who stood about the door growled seamen's oaths.

"There are things that seem hard," the Colonel continued, "and being begun, pouf! they are done while you think of them!"

Captain Augustin of Bordeaux swelled out his breast. "That is true," he said. "I have done things like that."

"Then do one more!"

The skipper's eyes surveyed the men's faces. He caught the spark in their eyes. "I will do it," he cried.

"Good!" Colonel John cried. "The arms first!"

CHAPTER XIII

A SLIP

FLAVIA McMURROUGH enjoyed one advantage over her partners in conspiracy. She could rise on the morning after the night of the bonfires with a clear head.

Colonel John had scarcely passed away under guard before she was afoot, gay as a lark and trilling like one, for on this day would they begin a work the end of which no man could see, but which, to the close of time, should shed a lustre on the name of McMurrough. No more should their native land be swept along, a chained slave in the train of a more brutal, a more violent, and a more stupid people! From this day Ireland's valour should be recognized for what it was, her wit be turned to good uses, her old traditions be revived in the light of new glories. The tears rose to the girl's eyes, her bosom heaved, as she pictured the fruition of the work to be begun this day and with clasped hands and prayerful eyes sang her morning hymn.

The tears gushed from her eyes and with an overflowing heart she thanked heaven for the grace and favour that assigned her a part in the work. It was much — may she be forgiven! — if, in the first enthusiasm of the morning, she gave a single thought to the misguided kinsman whose opposition had exposed him to dangers at which she vaguely guessed.

She lived in a dream, but a golden dream, and when she descended to the living-room her lips quivered as she kissed the Bishop's hand and received on her bent knees his episcopal blessing. "And on this house, my daughter," he added, "and on this day!"

"Amen!" she murmured in her heart.

True, breakfast, and the hour after breakfast, gave some pause to her happiness. The men's nerves were on edge with potheen and they had not been at table five minutes before quarrelling broke out. The Spanish officer who was in attendance on Cammock came to words with one of the O'Beirnes, who resented the notion that the Admiral's safety was not sufficiently secured by the Irish about him. The peace was kept with difficulty, and so much ill-feeling survived the outbreak that Cammock thought it prudent to remit two-thirds of the sailors to the ship.

This was not a promising beginning, where the numbers were already so scanty that the Bishop wondered in his heart whether his dupes would dare to pass from words to action. But it was not all. Some one spoke of Asgill, and of another justice in the neighbourhood, asserting that their hearts were with the rising, and that at a later point their aid might be expected.

"The Evil One's spawn!" cried Sir Donny, rising in his place, and speaking under the influence of great excitement. "If you 're for dealing with them, I 'm riding! No Protestants! I 'd as soon never wear sword again as wear it in their company."

"You 're not meaning it, Sir Donny!" Uncle Ulick said.

"Faith, but if he 's not, I am!" cried old Tim Burke, rising and banging the table with his fist. "'T is what I 'm meaning, and not a bit of a mistake! Just that!"

Another backed him, with so much violence that the most moderate and sensible looked serious and it needed the Bishop's interference to calm the storm. "We need not decide one way or the other," he said, "until they come in." Probably he thought that an unlikely contingency. "There are arguments on both sides," he continued, blandly. "But of this at another time. I think we must be moving, gentlemen. It grows late."

While the gentry talked thus at table, the courtyard and the space between the house and the lake began to present, where the mist allowed them to be seen, the lively and animated appearance which the Irish, ever lovers of a crowd, admire. Food and drink were there served to the barefoot, shock-headed boys drawn up in bodies under their priests, or under the great men's agents; and when these matters had been consumed one band after another moved off in the direction of the rendezvous. This was at the Carraghalin, a name long given to the ruins of an abbey situate in an upland valley above the waterfall.

The orders for all were to take their seats in an orderly fashion and in a mighty semicircle about a well-known rock situate a hundred yards from the abbey. Tradition reported that in old days this rock had been a pulpit, and that thence the Irish Apostle had preached to the heathen. The turf about it was dry, sweet, and sheep bitten; on either side it sloped gently to the rock, while a sentry posted on each of the two low hills which flanked the vale was a sufficient surety against surprise.

It was not until the last of the peasants had filed off that the gentry began to make their way in the same direction. The buckeens were the first to go, while the last to leave were the Admiral and the Bishop, honourably escorted, as became their rank, by their host and hostess.

Freed from the wrangling and confusion which the presence of the others bred, Flavia regained her serenity as she walked. There was nothing, indeed, in the face of nature, in the mist and the dark day, and the moisture that hung in beads on thorn and furze, to cheer her. But she drew her spirits from a higher source, and, sanguine and self-reliant, foreseeing naught but success, stepped proudly along beside the Bishop, who found, perhaps, in her presence and her courage a make-weight for the gloom of the day.

"You are sure," he said, smiling, "that we shall not lose our way?"

"Ah! and I am sure," she answered, "I could take you blindfold."

"The mist ——"

"It stands, my lord, for the mist overhanging this poor land, which our sun shall disperse."

"God grant it!" he said. "God grant it, indeed, my daughter!" But, do what he would, he spoke without fervour.

They passed along the lake edge, catching now and then the shimmer of water on their right. Thence they ascended the steep path that led up the glen of the waterfall to the level of the platform on which the old tower stood. Leaving this on the right, they climbed yet a little higher, and entered a deep driftway that, at the summit of the gorge, clove its way between the mound behind the tower and the hill on their left, and so penetrated presently to the valley of the Carraghalin. The mist was thinner here, the nature of the ground was more perceptible, and they had not proceeded fifty yards along the sunken way before Cammock, who was leading, in the company of The McMurrough, halted.

"A fine place for a stand," he said, looking about him with a soldierly eye. "And better for an ambush. Especially on such a morning as this, when you cannot see a man five paces away."

"I trust," the Bishop answered, smiling, "that we shall have no need to make the one or to fear the other."

"You could hold this," Flavia asked eagerly, "with such men as we have?"

"Against an army," Cammock answered.

"Against an army!" she murmured as, her heart beating high with pride, they resumed their way, Flavia and the Bishop in the van. "Against an army!" she repeated fondly.

The words had not fully left her lips when she recoiled.

At the same moment the Bishop uttered an exclamation, Cammock swore and seized his hilt, The McMurrough turned as if to flee. For on the path close to them, facing them with a pistol in his hand, stood Colonel Sullivan.

He levelled the pistol at the head of the nearest man, and though Flavia, with instant presence of mind, struck it up, the act helped little. Before Cammock could clear his blade, or his companions back up his resistance, four or five men of Colonel John's following, flung themselves on them from behind. They were seized, strong arms pinioned them, knives were at their throats. In a twinkling, and while they still expected death, sacks were dragged over their heads and down to their waists, and they were helpless.

It was well, it was neatly done; and completely done, with a single drawback. The men had not seized Flavia, and, white as paper, but with rage, not fear, she screamed shrilly for help — screamed twice.

She would have screamed a third time, but Colonel Sullivan, who knew that they were scarcely two furlongs from the meeting-place, and from some hundreds of merciless foes, did the only thing possible. He flung his arms round her, pressed her face roughly against his shoulder, smothered her cries remorselessly. Then raising her, aided by the man with the musket, he bore her, vainly struggling — and, it must be owned, scratching — after the others out of the driftway.

The thing done, the Colonel's little band of Frenchmen knew that they had cast the die and must now succeed or perish. The girl's screams, quickly suppressed, might not have given the alarm; but they had set nerves on edge. The prick of a knife was used — and often — to apprize the blinded prisoners that if they did not move they would be piked. They were dragged, a seaman on either side of each captive, over some hundred paces of rough ground, through the stream, and so into a path little better than a sheep-track which ran round the farther side of the hill of the tower, and descended that way to the more remote bank of the lake. It was a rugged path, steep and slippery, dropping precipitously a couple of feet in places, and more than once following the bed of the stream. But it was traceable even in the mist, and the party from the sloop, once put on it, could follow it.

If no late comer to the meeting encountered them, Colonel John, to whom every foot of the ground was familiar, saw no reason, apart from the chances of pursuit, why they should not convey their prisoners to the sloop. All, however, depended on time. If Flavia's screams had not given the alarm, it would soon be given by the absence of those whom the people had come to meet. The missing leaders would be sought, pursuit would be organized.

But, with peril on every side of them, Flavia was still the main, the real difficulty. Colonel Sullivan could not hope to carry her far, even with the help of the man who fettered her feet, and bore part of her weight. Twice she freed her mouth and uttered a stifled cry. The Colonel only pressed her face more ruthlessly to him — his men's lives depended on her silence. But the sweat stood on his brow; and, after carrying her no more than three hundred yards, he staggered under the unwilling burden. He was on the path now and descending, and he held out a little farther.

But presently, when he hoped that she had swooned, she fell to struggling more desperately. He thought, on this, that he might be smothering her; and he relaxed his hold to allow her to breathe. For reward she struck him madly, furiously in the face, and he had to stifle her again.

But his heart was sick. It was a horrible, a brutal business, a thing he had not foreseen on board the *Cormorant*. He had supposed that she would faint at the first alarm; and his courage, which would have faced almost any event with coolness, quailed. He could not murder the girl, and she would not be silent. No, she would not be silent! Short of setting her down and binding her hand and foot, which would take time, and was horrible to imagine, he could not see what to do. And the man with him, who saw the rest of the party outstripping them, and as good as disappearing in the fog, who fancied, with every step, that he heard the feet of merciless pursuers overtaking them, was frantic with impatience.

Then Colonel John, with the sweat standing on his brow, did a thing to which he afterward looked back with great astonishment.

"Give me your knife," he said, with a groan, "and hold her hands! We must silence her, and there is only one way!"

The man, terrified as he was, and selfish as terrified men are, recoiled from the deed. "My God!" he said. "No!"

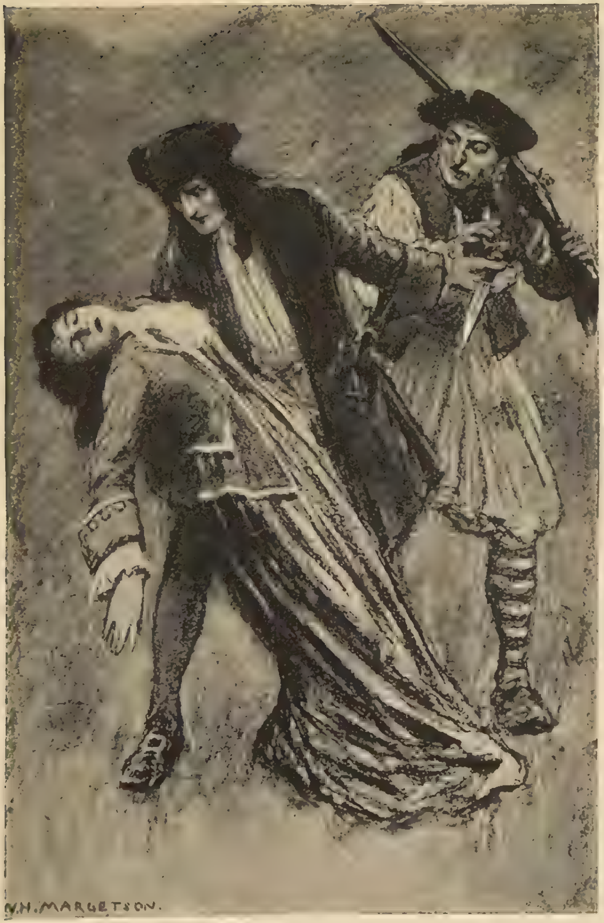
"Yes!" Colonel John retorted fiercely. "The knife! — the knife, man! And do you hold her hands!"

With a jerk he lifted her face from his breast — and this time she neither struck him nor screamed. The man had half-heartedly drawn his knife. The Colonel snatched it from him. "Now her hands!" he said. "Hold her, fool! I know where to strike!"

She opened her mouth to shriek, but no sound came. She had heard, she understood; and for a moment she could neither struggle nor cry. That terror which rage and an almost indomitable spirit had kept at bay seized her; the sight of the gleaming death poised above her paralyzed her throat. Her mouth gaped, her eyes glared at the steel; then, with a queer sobbing sound, she fainted.

"Thank God!" the Colonel cried. He thrust the knife back into the man's hands, and, raising the girl again in his arms, "There 's a house a little below," he said. "We can leave her there! Hurry, man! — hurry!"

He had not traversed that road for twenty years, but his memory had not tricked him. Less than fifty paces below they came on a cabin, close to the foot of the waterfall. The door was not fastened — for what, in such a place, was there to steal? — and Colonel John thrust it open with his foot. The interior was dark, the place was almost windowless; but he made out the form of an old crone who, nursing her knees, crouched with a pipe in her


W.H. MARGETSON.

"THEN, WITH A QUEER SOBBING SOUND SHE FAINTED"

mouth beside a handful of peat. Seeing him, the woman tottered to her feet with a cry of alarm, and shaded her bleared eyes from the inrush of daylight. She gabbled shrilly, but she knew only Erse, and Colonel John attempted no explanation.

"The Lady of the House," he said, in that tongue. And he laid Flavia, not ungently, but very quickly, on the floor. He turned about without another word, shut the door on the two, and hurried along the path at the full stretch of his legs. In half a minute he had overtaken his companion, and the two pressed on together on the heels of the main party.

The old beldame, left alone with the girl, viewed her with an astonishment which would have been greater if she had not reached that age at which all sensations become dulled. How the Lady of the House, who was to her both Power and Providence, came to be there, and there in that state, passed her conception. But she had the sense to loosen the girl's frock at the neck, to throw water on her face, and to beat her hands. In a very few minutes Flavia, who had never swooned before — fashionable as the exercise was at this period in feminine society — sighed once or twice, and came to herself.

"Where am I?" she muttered. Still for some moments she continued to look about her in a dazed way; at length she recognized the old woman, and the cottage. Then she remembered, with a moan, what had happened — the ambuscade, the flight, the knife.

She could not turn whiter, but she shuddered and closed her eyes. At last, with shrinking, she looked at her dress. "Am I — hurt?" she whispered.

The old woman did not understand, but she patted Flavia's hand. Meanwhile the girl saw that there was no blood on her dress, and she found courage to raise her hand to her throat. She found no wound. At that she smiled faintly. Then she began to cry — for she was a woman.

But, broken as she was by that moment of terror, Flavia very quickly overcame her weakness. She rose, she understood, and she extended her arms in rage and grief and unavailing passion.

She would that the villains had killed her! She would that they had finished her life! Why should she survive, except for vengeance? For not only were her hopes for Ireland fallen; not only were those who had trusted themselves to The McMurrough perishing even now in the hands of ruthless foes; but her brother, whom her prayers, her influence, had brought into this path, he too was snared, of his fate also there could be no doubt!

She felt all that was most keen, most poignant, of grief, of anger, of indignation. But the sharpest pang of all — had she analyzed her feelings — was inflicted by the consciousness of failure, and of failure verging on the ignominious. The mature take good and evil fortune as they come; but to fail at first setting out in life, to be outwitted in the opening venture, is a mishap which sours the magnanimous and poisons young blood.

She had not known before what it was to hate. Now she only lived to hate: to hate the man who had shown himself so much cleverer than her friends, who, in a twinkling, and by a single blow, had wrecked her plans, duped her allies, betrayed her brother, made her name a laughing-stock, robbed Ireland of a last chance of freedom! Who had held her in his arms, terrified her, mastered her! Oh, why had she swooned? Why had she not rather, disregarding her womanish weakness, her womanish fears, snatched the knife from him and plunged it into his treacherous breast?

CHAPTER XIV

THE COLONEL'S TERMS

CAMMOCK and the Bishop, certain only that they were in hostile hands, and hurried, blind and helpless, to an unknown doom, might have been pardoned had they succumbed to despair. But they did not succumb. The habit of danger, and a hundred adventures and escapes, had hardened them; they felt more rage than fear. Stunned for a moment by the audacity of the attack, they had not been dragged a hundred yards before they began to calculate the chances. If the purpose of those into whose hands they had fallen were to murder them they would have been piked on the spot. On the other hand, if their captors' object was to deliver them to English justice, weeks, if not months, must elapse before they stood at the bar on a capital charge; much water must flow under the bridges, and many a thing might happen, by force or fraud, in the interval.

So, half-stifled and bitterly chagrined as they were, they did not waste their strength in a vain resistance.

With the third of the prisoners it was otherwise. The courage of the Irish is more conspicuous in the advance than in the retreat; and even of that joy in the conflict, which is their birthright and their fame, Flavia had taken more than her woman's share. In James McMurrough's mean nature there was small room for the generous passions. Unlike his sister, he would have struck the face of no man in whose power he lay; nor was he one to keep a stout heart when his hands were bound. Conscience does not always make cowards. But he knew into whose hands he had fallen, he knew the fate to which he had himself consigned Colonel John, and his heart was water, his hair rose, as he pictured in livid hues the fate that now awaited himself.

As he had meant to do to the other, it would be done to him! He felt the cruel pike rend the gasping throat. Or would they throw him, bound and blind as he was, into the sullen lake — yes, that was it! They were carrying him that way, they were taking him to the lake.

And once and twice, in the insanity of fear, he fought with his bonds until the blood came, even throwing himself down, until the men, out of patience, pricked him savagely, and drove him, venting choked cries of pain, to his feet again. After the second attempt he staggered on, beaten, hopeless.

He was aware that Colonel John was not with them, and then, again, that he was with them; and then — they were on the wide track now between the end of the lake and the sea — that they were proceeding with increased caution. That might have given a braver man hope, the hope of rescue. But rescue had itself terrors for The McMurrough. His captors, if pressed, might hasten the end, or his friends might strike him in the *mêlée*. And so, with every furlong of the forced journey, he died a fresh death. And the furlongs seemed interminable. But at last he heard the fall of the waves on the shore, the men about him spoke louder, he caught a distant hail. Laughter and exclamations of triumph reached him, and the voices of men who had won in spite of odds.

Then a boat grated on the pebbles, he was lifted into it, and thrust down in the bottom. He felt it float off, and heard the measured sound of the oars in the thole-pins. A few moments elapsed, the sound of the oars ceased, the boat bumped something. He was raised to his feet, his hands were unbound, he was set on a rope-ladder, and bidden to climb. Obeying with shaking knees, he was led across what he guessed to be a deck, and down steep stairs. Then his head was freed from the sack, and, sweating, disheveled, pale with exhaustion and fear, he looked about him.

The fog was still thick outside, turning day into twilight, and the cabin lamp had been lit and swung above the narrow table, filling the low-browed, Dutch-like interior with a strong but shifting light. Behind the table Colonel John and the skipper leant against a bulkhead; before them, on the nearer side of the table, were ranged the three captives. Behind these, again, the dark, grinning faces of the sailors, with their tarred pigtails and flashing eyes, filled the doorway; and, beyond doubt, viewed under the uncertain light of the lamp, they showed a wild and savage crew. As James McMurrough looked, his hopes, which had risen during the last few minutes, sank. Escape, or chance of escape, there was none. He was helpless, and what those into whose hands he had fallen determined, he must suffer. For a moment his heart stood still, his mouth gaped, he swayed on his feet. Then he clutched the table and steadied himself.

"I am — giddy," he muttered.

"I am sorry that you have been put to so much inconvenience," Colonel John answered civilly.

The words, the tone, might have reassured him if he had not suspected a devilish irony. Even when Colonel John proceeded to direct one of the men to open a port-hole and admit more air, he derived no comfort from the attention. But steady! Colonel John was speaking again.

"You, too, gentlemen," he said, addressing Cammock and the Bishop, "I am sorry that I have been forced to put you to so much discomfort. But I saw no other way of effecting my purpose. And," he went on with a smile, "if you ask my warranty for acting as I have acted ——"

"I do!" the Bishop said between his teeth. The Admiral said nothing, but breathed hard.

"Then I can only vouch," the Colonel answered, "the authority by virtue of which you seized me yesterday. I give you credit, reverend father, and you, Admiral, for a belief that in creating a rising here you were serving a cause which you think worthy of sacrifice — the sacrifice of others as well as of yourselves. But I tell you, as frankly, I feel it my duty to prevent that rising; and for the moment fortune is with me. Now I need hardly say," Colonel John continued, with an appearance almost of *bonhomie,* "that I do not wish to go further than is necessary. I might hand you over to the English authorities. But far be it from me to do that! I would have no man's blood on my hands. And though I say at once I would not shrink, were there no other way of saving innocent lives, from sending you to the scaffold ——"

"A thousand thanks to you!" the Bishop said. But, brave man as he was, the irony in his voice masked relief; and not then, but a moment later, he passed his handkerchief across his brow. Cammock said nothing, but the angry, bloodshot eyes which he fixed on the Colonel lost a little of their ferocity.

"I say, I would not shrink from doing that," Colonel John continued mildly, "were it necessary. Fortunately for us all, it is not necessary. I must provide against your immediate return. I must see that the movement which will die in your absence is not revived by any word from you. To that end, gentlemen, I must put you to the inconvenience of a prolonged sea-voyage."

"If I could speak with you in private?" the Bishop said.

"You will have every opportunity," Colonel John answered, smiling, "of speaking to Captain Augustin in private."

"Still, sir, if I could see you alone I think I could convince you ——"

"You shall have every opportunity of convincing Captain Augustin," Colonel John returned, smiling more broadly, "and of convincing him by the same means which

I venture to think, reverend sir, you would employ with me. To be plain, he will take you to sea for a certain period and at the end of that time, if your arguments are sufficiently weighty, he will land you on the French shore. He will be at the loss of his cargo, and that loss I fear you will have to make good. Something, too, he may charge by way of interest, and for your passage." By this time the sailors were on the broad grin. "A trifle, perhaps, for landing dues. But I have spoken with him to be moderate, and I doubt not that within a few weeks you, Admiral Cammock, will be with your command, and the reverend father will be pursuing his calling in another place."

For a moment there was silence, save for a titter from the group of seamen. Then Cammock laughed — a curt, barking laugh. "A bite!" he said. "If I can ever repay it, sir, I will! Be sure of that!"

Colonel John bowed courteously.

The Bishop took it otherwise. The veins on his forehead swelled, and he had much ado to control himself. The truth was, he feared ridicule more than he feared danger, perhaps more than he feared death; and such an end to such an enterprise was hard to bear.

"Is there no alternative?" he asked, barely able to speak for the chagrin that took him by the throat.

"One, if you prefer it," Colonel Sullivan answered suavely. "You can take your chance with the English authorities. For myself, I lean to the course I have suggested."

"If money were paid down — now? Now, sir?"

"It would not avail."

"Much money?"

"No."

The Bishop glared at him for a few seconds. Then his face relaxed, his eyes grew mild, his chin sank on his breast. His fingers drummed on the table. "His will be done!" he said — "His will be done! I was not worthy."

His surrender seemed to sting Cammock. Perhaps in the course of their joint adventures he had come to know and to respect his companion, and felt more for him than for himself.

"If I had you on my quarter-deck for only half an hour," he growled, "I would learn who was the better man! Ah, my man, I would!"

"The doubt flatters me," Colonel John answered, viewing them both with great respect; for he saw that, bad or good, they were men. Then, "That being settled," he continued, "I shall ask you, gentlemen, to go on deck for a few moments, that I may say a word to my kinsman."

"He is not to go with us?"

"That remains to be seen," Colonel John replied, a note of sternness in his voice. Still they hesitated, and he stood; but at last, in obedience to his courteous gesture, they bowed, turned — with a deep sigh on the Bishop's part — and clambered up the companion. The seamen had already vanished at a word from Augustin, who himself proceeded to follow his prisoners on deck.

"Sit down!" Colonel Sullivan said, the same sternness in his voice. And he sat down on his side of the table, while James McMurrough, with a sullen look but a beating heart, took his seat on the other. The fear of immediate death had left the young man; he tried to put on an air of bravado, but with so little success that if his sister had seen him thus she had been blind indeed if she had not discerned, between these two men seated opposite to one another, the difference that exists between the great and the small, the strong and the infirm of purpose.

It was significant of that difference that the one was silent at will, while the other spoke because he had not the force to be silent.

"What are you wanting with me?" the young man asked.

"Is it not you," Colonel John answered, with a piercing look, "will be wanting to know where O'Sullivan Og is — O'Sullivan Og, whom you sent to do your bidding this morning."

The young man turned a shade paler, and his bravado fell from him. His breath seemed to stop. Then, "Where?" he whispered — "where is he?"

"Where, I pray, heaven," Colonel John answered, with the same solemnity, "may have mercy upon him."

"He is not dead?" The McMurrough cried, his voice rising on the last word.

"I have little doubt he is," the Colonel replied. "Dead, sir! And the men who were with him — dead also, or the most part of them. Dead, James McMurrough, on the errand they went for you."

The shock of the news struck the young man dumb, and for some moments he stared at the Colonel, his face colourless. At length, "All dead?" he whispered. "Not all?"

"For what I know!" Colonel John replied. "Heaven forgive them!" And, in half a dozen sentences, he told him what had happened. Then: "They are the first fruits," he continued sternly; "God grant that they be the last fruits of this reckless plot! Not that I blame them, who did but as they were bid. Nor do I blame any man or any woman who embarked on this with a single heart, for the sake of an end which they set above their own lives. But — but" — and Colonel John's voice grew more grave — "there was one who had not a single heart. There was one who was willing to do murder, not in blind obedience, nor for a great cause, but to serve his own private interest."

"No! no!" the young man cried, cowering before him. "It is not true!"

"One who was ready to do murder," Colonel John continued pitilessly, "because it suited him to remove a man!"

"No! no!" the wretched youth cried, almost grovelling before him. "It was all of them! — it was all!"

"It was not all!" Colonel John retorted; but there was a keenness in his face which showed that he had still something to learn.

"It was — those two — on deck!" The McMurrough cried eagerly. "I swear it was! They said — it was necessary."

"They were one with you in condemning! Be it so! I believe you! But who spared?"

"I!" The McMurrough cried, breathlessly eager to exculpate himself. "It was I alone. I! I swear it! I sent the boy!"

"You spared? Yes, and you alone!" the Colonel made answer. "You spared because you learned that I had made a will, and you feared lest that which had passed to me in trust might pass to a stranger for good and all! You spared because it was to your interest, your advantage! I say, out of your own mouth you are condemned."

James McMurrough had scarcely force to follow the pitiless reasoning by which the elder man convicted him. But his conscience filled the hiatus, and what his tongue did not own his colourless face, his terrified eyes, confessed.

"You have fallen into our hands," Colonel John continued, grave as fate. "Why should we not deal with you as you would have dealt with us? No!" — the young man by a gesture had appealed to those on deck — "no! They may have consented to my death; but as the judge condemns, or the soldier kills; you, for your private profit and advantage. Nevertheless, I shall not deal so with you. You can go as they are going — abroad, to return, I hope, a wiser man. Or ——"

"Or — what?" the young man cried hurriedly.

"Or you can stay here," Colonel John continued, "and we will treat the past as if it had not been. But on a condition."

James's colour came back. "What 'll you be wanting?" he muttered, averting his gaze.

"You must swear that you will not pursue this foolish plan further. That first."

"What can I be doing without *them?*" was the sullen answer.

"Very true," Colonel John rejoined. "But you must swear also, my friend, that you will not attempt anything against me, nor be party to anything."

"What 'd I be doing?"

"Don't lie!" the Colonel replied, losing his temper for a single instant. "I 've no time to bandy words, and you know how you stand. Swear on your hope of salvation to those two things, and you may stay. Refuse, and I make myself safe by your absence."

The young man had the sense to know that he was escaping lightly. He was willing enough to swear that he would not pursue that enterprise further. But the second undertaking stuck in his gizzard. He hated Colonel John — for the past wrong, for the past defeat, above all for the present humiliation.

"I'm having no choice," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Very good," Colonel John answered curtly. And, going to the door, he called Bale from his station by the hatchway, and despatched him to the Bishop and to Admiral Cammock, requesting them to do him the honour to descend.

They came readily enough, in the hope of some favourable turn. But the Colonel's words quickly set them right.

"Gentlemen," he said politely, "I know you to be men of honour in private life. For this reason I have asked you to be present as witnesses to the bargain between my cousin and myself. Blood is thicker than water: he has no mind to go abroad, and I have no mind to send him against his will. But his presence, after what has passed, is a standing peril to myself. To meet this difficulty he is ready to swear by all he holds sacred, and upon his honour, that he will attempt nothing against me, nor be a party to it. Is that so, sir?" the speaker continued. "Do you willingly, in the presence of these gentlemen, give that undertaking?"

The young man, with averted eyes and a downcast face, nodded.

"I am afraid I must trouble you to speak," Colonel John said.

"I do," he muttered, looking at no one.

"Further, that you will not within six months attempt anything against the government?" Colonel John continued.

"I will not."

"Very good. I accept your word, and I thank these gentlemen for their courtesy in condescending to act as witnesses. Admiral Cammock and you, reverend father," Colonel John continued, "it remains but to bid you farewell, and to ask you to believe" — the Colonel paused — "that I have not pushed further than was necessary the advantage I gained."

"By a neat stroke, Colonel Sullivan," the Bishop replied, with a rather sour smile, "not to say a bold one. But one, I 'd have you notice, that cannot be repeated."

"Maybe not," the Colonel answered. "I am content to think that for some time to come I have transferred your operations, gentlemen, to a sphere where I am not concerned for the lives of the people."

"There are things more precious than lives," the Bishop said.

"I admit it. More by token I 'm blaming you little — only you see, sir, I differ. That is all."

With that Colonel Sullivan bowed, and left the cabin, and The McMurrough, who had listened to the colloquy with the air of a whipped hound, slunk after him. On deck the Colonel and Augustin talked apart for a moment, then the former signed to the young man to go down into the boat, which lay alongside with a couple of men at the oars, and Bale seated in the stern-sheets.

After the lapse of a minute or two Colonel John joined him, and the rowers pushed off, while Augustin and the crew leant over the rail to see them go, and to send after them a torrent of voluble good wishes. A very few strokes of the oars brought the passengers to land.

Bale stayed to exchange a few words with the seamen, while Colonel John and The McMurrough set off along the beach. And astonishment filled the young man, and grew as they walked. Did Colonel John, after all that had happened, mean to return to Morristown? to establish himself calmly — he, alone — in the midst of the conspirators whose leaders he had removed?

It seemed incredible! For though he, James McMurrough, thirst for revenge as he might, was muzzled by his oath, what of the others?

Still the Colonel walked on by his side. And now they were in sight of Skull — of the old tower and the house by the jetty, looming large through the dripping mist. At last Colonel John spoke.

"It was fortunate that I made my will as I came through Paris," he said.

CHAPTER XV

FEMINA FURENS

COLONEL JOHN had run little risk of being wrong in taking for granted that the meeting at the Carraghalin, mysteriously robbed of the chiefs from over-seas, would disperse; either amid the peals of Homeric laughter that in Ireland greet a monster jest, or, in sadder mood, cursing the detested Saxon for one more added to the many wrongs of a downtrodden land.

Had Flavia escaped, her courage and enthusiasm might have supported the spirits of the assemblage and kept it together. But Uncle Ulick had not the force to do this: much less had old Timothy Burke or Sir Donny.

Their views were more singular than cheerful.

"Very like," Sir Donny said, with a fallen under-lip, "the ould earth's opened her mouth and swallowed them. She 's tired, small blame to her, with all the heretics burdening her and tormenting her."

"Whisht, man!" the other answered. "Be easy; you 're forgetting one 's a bishop. Small chance of the devil's tackling him, and like enough the holy water and all ready to his hand!"

"Then I 'm not knowing what it is," the first pronounced hopelessly.

"There you speak truth, Sir Donny," Tim Burke answered. "Is it they can be losing their way in the least taste of fog there is, do you think?"

"And the young lady knowing the path, so that she 'd be walking it blindfold in the dark!"

"I 'm fearing, then, it will be the garr'son from Tralee," was Uncle Ulick's contribution. "The saints be between us and them, and grant we 'll not be seeing more of them than we like, and sooner!"

"Amen to that same!" replied old Timothy Burke, with an uneasy look behind him.

There was nothing comforting in this. The messengers sent to learn why the expected party did not arrive had as little cheer to give; they could learn nothing. An hour went by, a second and part of a third; messengers departed and came, and presently something like the truth got abroad. Still the greater part of the assemblage, with Irish patience, remained seated in ranks on the slopes of the hills, the women with their drugget shawls drawn over their heads, the men with their frieze coats hanging loose about them.

But a time came, about high noon, when the assemblage — and the fog — began at last to melt. Sir Donny was gone, and old Tim Burke of Maamtrasna. They had slipped homeward, by little-known tracks across the peat hags; and, the spirit all gone out of them, had turned their minds to oaths and alibis. They had been in trouble before, and were taken to know; and their departure sapped the O'Beirnes' resolution, whose uneasy faces as window, and they saw a sight which his mind declined to believe. Two men had entered the courtyard — had entered with astonishing, with petrifying nonchalance, as it seemed to him. For the first was Colonel Sullivan. The second — but the second slunk at the heels of the first with a hang-dog air — was James McMurrough.

Fortunately Flavia, whose eyes were glooming on the cold hearth, had her back to the casement. Uncle Ulick rose. His thoughts came with a shock against the possibility that Colonel John had the garrison of Tralee at his back. But, although The McMurrough had all the appearance of a prisoner, Ulick thrust away the notion as soon as it occurred. To clear his mind, he looked to see how the men engaged in getting out the powder were taking it. They had ceased to work, and were staring with all their eyes. Something in their bearing told Uncle Ulick that the notion which had occurred to him had occurred to them, and that they were prepared to run at the least alarm.

"His blood be on his own head!" he muttered. But he did not say it in the tone of a man who meant it.

"Amen!" she cried. The words fell in with her thoughts.

By this time Colonel Sullivan was within four paces of the door. In a handturn he would be in the room, he would be actually in the girl's presence — and Uncle Ulick shrank from the scene which must follow. Colonel John was, indeed, and plainly, running on his fate. Already the O'Beirnes, awakening from their trance of astonishment, were closing in behind him with grim faces; and short of the garrison of Tralee the big man saw no help for him; well-nigh — so strongly did even he feel on the matter — he desired none. But Flavia must have no part in it. Let the girl be clear of it!

The big man took two steps to the door, opened it, slipped through, and closed it behind him. His breast as good as touched that of Colonel Sullivan, who was on the threshold. Behind the Colonel was James McMurrough; behind James were the two O'Beirnes and two others, of whose object, as they cut off the Colonel's retreat, no man who saw their faces could doubt.

For once, in view of the worse things that might happen in the house, Ulick was firm. "You can't come in!" he said, his face pale and frowning. He had no word of greeting for the Colonel. "You can't come in!" he repeated, staring straight at him.

The Colonel turned and saw the four men with arms in their hands spreading out behind him. He understood. "You had better let me in," he said gently. "James will talk to them."

"James ——"

"You had better speak to them," Colonel John continued, addressing his companion. "And you, Ulick ——"

"You can't come in," Ulick repeated grimly.

James McMurrough interposed in his harshest tone. "An end to this!" he cried. "Who are you to bar the door, Ulick! And you, Phelim and Morty, be easy a minute till you hear me speak."

Ulick still barred the way. "James," he said, in a voice little above a whisper, "you don't know ——"

"I know enough!" The McMurrough answered violently. It went sadly against the grain with him to shield his enemy, but so it must be. "Curse you, let him in!" he continued, fiercely; they were making his task more hard for him. "And have a care of him," he added anxiously. "Do you hear? Have a care of him!"

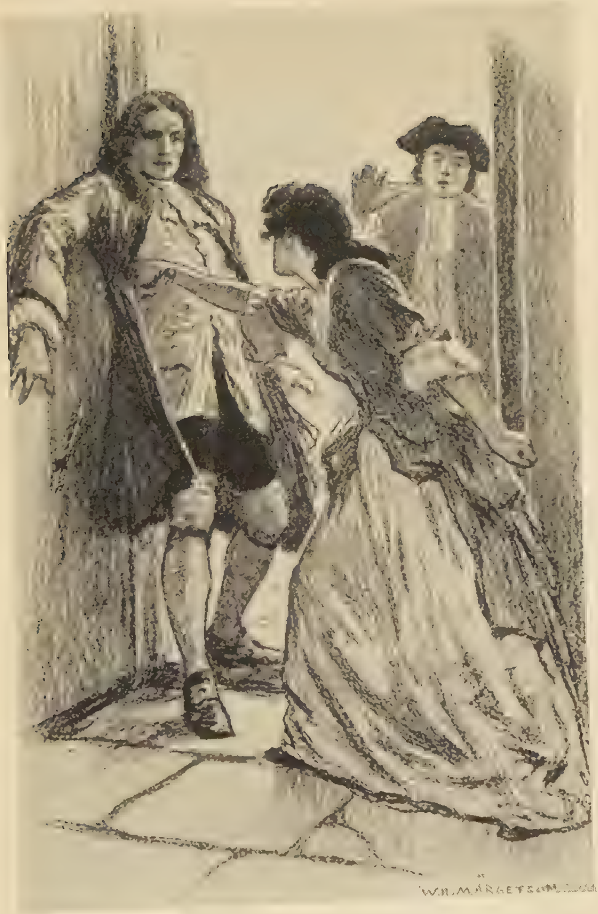
Uncle Ulick made a last feeble attempt. "But Flavia," he said. "Flavia is there and ——"

"Curse the girl!" James answered. "Get out of the road and let the man in! Is this my house or yours?"

Ulick yielded, as he had yielded so often before. He stood aside. Colonel John opened the door and entered.

The rest happened so quickly that no movement on his part could have saved him. Flavia had heard their voices in altercation — it might be half a minute, it might be a few seconds before. She had risen to her feet, she had recognized the voice of one of the speakers — he had spoken once only, but that was enough — she had snatched up the naked sword that since the previous morning had leaned in the chimney corner. As Colonel John crossed the threshold — oh, dastardly audacity, oh, insolence incredible, that in the hour of his triumph he should soil that threshold! — she lunged with all the force of her strong young arm at his heart.

With such violence that the hilt struck his breast and


W.H. MARGETSON

"SHE LUNGED WITH ALL THE FORCE OF HER STRONG YOUNG ARM"

hurled him bodily against the doorpost, while the blade broke off, shivered by contact with the hard wood.

Uncle Ulick uttered a cry of horror. "You have killed him!"

"His blood ——"

She stopped on the word. For instead of falling Colonel John was regaining his balance. "Flavia!" he cried — the blade had passed through his coat, missing his breast by a bare half-inch. "Flavia, hold! Listen! Listen a moment!"

But in a frenzy of rage, as soon as she saw that her blow had failed, she struck at him with the hilt and the ragged blade that remained — struck at his face, struck at his breast, with cries of fury almost animal. "Wretch! wretch!" she cried — "die! If they are cowards, I am not! Die!"

The scene was atrocious, and Uncle Ulick, staring open-mouthed, gave no help. But Colonel Sullivan mastered her wrists, though not until he had sustained a long bleeding cut on the jaw. Even then, though fettered, and though he had forced her to drop the weapon, she struggled desperately with him — as she had struggled when he carried her through the mist. "Kill him! kill him!" she shrieked. "Help! help!"

The men would have killed him twice and thrice if The McMurrough, with voice and blade and frantic imprecations and the interposition of his own body, had not kept the O'Beirnes and the others at bay — explaining, deprecating, praying, cursing, all in a breath. Twice a blow was struck at the Colonel through the doorway, but one fell short and the other James McMurrough parried. For a moment the peril was of the greatest: the girl's cries, the sight of her struggling in Colonel John's grip, wrought the men almost beyond James's holding. Then the strength went out of her suddenly, she ceased to fight, and but for Colonel Sullivan's grasp she would have fallen her length on the floor.

He knew that she was harmless then, and he thrust her into the nearest chair. He kicked the broken sword under the table, stanched the blood that trickled fast from his cheek; last of all, he looked at the men who were contending with James in the doorway.

"Gentlemen," he said, breathing a little quickly, but in no other way betraying the strait through which he had passed, "I shall not run away. I shall be here to answer you to-morrow, as fully as to-day. In the meantime I beg to suggest" — again he raised the handkerchief to his cheek and stanched the blood — "that you retire now, and hear what The McMurrough has to say to you: the more as the cases and the arms I see in the courtyard lie obnoxious to discovery and expose all to risk while they remain so."

His surprising coolness did more to check them than The McMurrough's efforts. They gaped at him in wonder. Then one uttered an imprecation.

"The McMurrough will explain if you will go with him," Colonel John answered patiently. "I say again, gentlemen, I shall not run away."

"If you mean her any harm ——"

"I mean her no harm."

"Are you alone?"

"I am alone."

So far Morty. But Phelim O'Beirne was not quite satisfied. "If a hair of her head be hurt ——" he growled, pushing himself forward, "I tell you, sir ——"

"And I tell you!" James McMurrough retorted, repelling him. "What are the hairs of her head to you, Phelim O'Beirne? Am I not him that 's her brother? A truce to your prating, curse you, and be coming with me. I understand him, and that is enough!"

"But his reverence ——"

"His reverence is as safe as you or me!" James retorted. "If it were not so, are you thinking I 'd be here? Fie on you!" he went on, pushing Phelim through the door; "you are good at the talking now, when it 's little good it will be doing. But where were you this morning when a good blow might have saved all?"

"Could I be helping it, when ——?"

The voices passed away, still wrangling across the courtyard. Uncle Ulick stepped to the door and closed it. Then he turned and spoke his mind.

"You were wrong to come back, John Sullivan," he said, the hardness of his tone bearing witness to his horror of what had happened. "It is no thanks to you that your blood is not on the girl's hands, and the floor of your grandfather's house! You 're a bold man, I allow. But the fox made too free with the window at last, and, take my word for it, there are a score of men, whose hands are surer than this child's, who will not rest till they have had your life! Be bid, and go, then. Be bid, and go while the breath is firm in you!"

Colonel John did not speak for a moment, and when he did answer, it was with a severity that overbore Ulick's anger. "If the breath be firm in those whom you, Ulick Sullivan," he said, "and your fellows would have duped, it is enough for me! For myself, whom should I fear? The plotters whose childish plans were not proof against the simplest stratagem? The conspirators" — his tone grew more cutting in its scorn — "who took it in hand to pull down a throne and were routed by a sergeant's guard? The poor puppets who played at a game too high for them, and danced to others' piping? Shall I fear them," he continued, the tail of his eye on the girl, who, sitting low in her chair, writhed involuntarily under his words — "poor tools, poor creatures, only a little less ignorant, only a little more guilty than the clods they would have led to the crows or the hangman? Is it these I am to flee from? Ulick Sullivan! I am not the man to flee from shadows!"

His tone, his manner, which were intended to open the girl's eyes, but did in fact increase her resentment — hurt even Uncle Ulick's pride. "Whisht, man," he said, bitterly. "It 's plain you 're thinking you 're master here!"

"I am," Colonel John replied sternly. "I am, and I intend to be. Nor a day too soon! Where all are children, there is need of a master! And for my cousin, let her hear the truth for once! Let her know what men who have seen the world think of the visions, from which she would have awakened in a dungeon, and her fellow-dupes under the gibbet! A great rising for a great cause, if it be real, man, if it be earnest, if it be based on forethought, heaven knows I hold it a fine thing, and a high thing! But the rising of a child with a bladder against an armed man, a rising that can ruin but cannot help, I know not whether to call it more silly or more wicked! Man, the devil does his choicest work through fools, not rogues! And, for certain, he never found fitter instruments than at Morristown yesterday."

Uncle Ulick swore impatiently. "We may be fools," be growled. "Yet spare the girl! Spare the girl!"

"What? Spare her the truth?"

"All! Everything!" Uncle Ulick cried, with unusual heat. "Cannot you see that she at least meant well!"

"Such do the most ill," Colonel John retorted, with sententious severity. "God forgive them — and her!" He paused for a moment and then, in a lighter tone, he continued, "As I do. Only there must be an end of this foolishness. The two men who had reason in their wrong-doing are beyond seas. The McMurrough is not so mad as to act without them. He" — with a faint smile — "is not implacable. You, Ulick, are not of the stuff of whom martyrs are made. But the two young men outside" — he paused as if he reflected — "they and three or four others are — what my cousin now listening to me makes them. They are tow, if the flame be brought near them. And therefore — and therefore," he repeated still more slowly, "I have spoken the truth and plainly. To this purpose, that there may be an end."

Flavia had sat at first with closed eyes, in a state next door to collapse, her head inclined, her arms drooping, as if at any moment she might sink to the floor. But in the course of his speaking a change had come over her. The last heavings of the storm, physical and mental, still shook her. But the indomitable youth in her, and the spirit which she had inherited from some dead forefather, were not to be long gainsaid. Slowly, as she listened her colour had returned, her face grown more firm, her form more stiff. In truth Colonel John had adopted the wrong course with her. He had been hard — knowing men better than women — when he should have been mild; he had browbeaten where he should have forgiven. And so at his last declaration, "There must be an end," she rose to her feet, and spoke. And speaking, she showed that neither the failure of her attempt on him, nor the bodily struggle with him, horribly as it humiliated her in the remembrance, had quelled her courage.

"An end!" she said, in a voice vibrating with emotion. "Yes, but it will be an end for you! Children, are we? Better that than be so old before our time, so cold of heart and cunning of head that there is naught real for us but that we touch and see, nothing high for us but that our words will be measuring, nothing worth risk but that we are safe to gain! Children, are we?" she continued, with deep passion. "But at least we believe! At least we own something higher than ourselves — a God, a Cause, a Country! At least we have not bartered all — all three and honour for a pittance of pay, fighting alike for right or wrong, betraying alike the right and wrong! Children? May be! But, God be thanked, we are warm, the blood runs in us ——"

"Flavia!"

"I say the blood runs in us!" she repeated. "And if we are foolish, we are wiser yet than one" — she looked at him with a strange steadfastness — "who in his wisdom thinks that a traitor can walk our Irish soil unharmed, or one go back and forth in safety who has ruined and shamed us! You have escaped my hand! But I know that all your boasted wisdom will not lengthen your life till the moon wanes!"

He had tried to interrupt her once — eagerly, vividly, as one who would defend himself. He answered her now after another fashion: perhaps he had learned his lesson. "If God wills," he said simply, "it will be as you say. And the road will lie open to you. Only while I live, Flavia, whether I love this Irish soil or not, or my country, or my honour, the storm shall not break here, nor the house fall from which we spring!"

"While you live!" she repeated, with a dreadful smile. "I tell you, I tell you," and she extended her hand toward him, "the winding-sheet is high upon your breast, and the salt dried that shall lie upon your heart."

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARPLOT

IF, AFTER that, Colonel Sullivan's life had depended on his courage or the vigilance of his servant, it is certain that Flavia's prophecy would have been quickly fulfilled. The part which he had played in the events at the Carraghalin was known to few; but the hundred tongues of rumour were abroad, carrying as many versions, and in all he was the marplot. His traffic with the Old Fox had spirited away the holy father and swept off also, probably on a broomstick, the doughty champion whose sole desire it was to lead the hosts of Ireland to victory.

The logical consequence was certain. That the man who had these things on his black heretic conscience should continue to haunt the scene of his crimes and lord it over those whom his misdeeds had sullied, was to the common mind unthinkable. To every potato-setter who, out of the corner of his eye, watched his passage, to every beggar by the road, this was plain and known, and the man already as the dead. If the cotters by the lakeside were not men enough, was there not Roaring Andy's band in the hills, who would cut any man's throat for a silver doubloon, and a heretic's for the "trate it would be, and sorra a bit of pay at all, the good men!"

Beyond doubt the Colonel's nerve, which enabled him to take his place as if nothing threatened him, went for something; and for something the sinister prestige which the disappearance of O'Sullivan Og and his whole party cast about him. The means by which the two prisoners, in face of odds so great, had destroyed their captors, were still a secret; but the Irish are ever open to superstitious beliefs, and the man who poured death as it were from a horn, went his way shrouded in a gloomy fame that might provoke the bold, but kept the timid at bay.

Before night it was known that the Colonel might be shot from behind with a silver bullet; or stabbed, if a man were bold enough, with a cross-handled knife, blessed and sprinkled. But woe to him whose aim proved faulty or his hand uncertain!

But this reputation alone, seeing that reckless spirits were not wanting, would have availed him little if the protection of The McMurrough had not been cast over him. Why it was cast over him men scarcely dared to guess. It was a dark thing into which it were ill to peer too closely. But the fact was certain that the anxiety of the young man that the Colonel might meet with no hurt was plain and notorious, a thing observed stealthily and with wonder.

Did Colonel John saunter across the court to look on the lake? The McMurrough was at his shoulder in a twinkling, and thence, with a haggard eye, searched the furze-bush for the glint of a gun-barrel, and the angle of the wall for a lurking foe. It was the same if the Colonel fared as far as the ruined tower, or stretched his legs on the road by the shore. The McMurrough could not be too near him, walked with his hand on his arm, cast from time to time vigilant looks to the rear. A score of times between rising and sleeping Colonel John smiled at the care that forewent his steps and covered his retreat; nor perhaps had the contempt in which he held James McMurrough ever reached a higher pitch than while he thus stood from hour to hour indebted to that young man for his life.

What Uncle Ulick, if he held the key to the matter, thought of it, did not appear; nor was Colonel John overcurious to know. But what Flavia thought of the position was a point which aroused his most lively curiosity. He gave her credit for feelings so deep and for a nature so downright, that time-serving or paltering were the last faults he looked to find in her. He could hardly believe that she would consent to sit at meat with him after what had happened; and possibly — for men are strange, and the motives of the best are mixed — a desire to see how she would bear herself in the circumstances had something to do with the course he was taking.

That she consented to the plan was soon made clear. She even took part in it. James could not be always at his elbow. The young man must sometimes retire. When this happened, the girl took her brother's place, stooped to dog the Colonel's footsteps, and for a day or two cast the mantle of her presence over the man she hated.

But stoop as she might, she never for a moment stooped to mask her hate. In her incomings and her outgoings, in her risings-up and at table with him, every movement of her body, the carriage of her head, the glance of her eye, showed that she despised him; that she who now suffered him was the same woman who had struck at his life, and, failing, repented only the failure.

For her brother's sake she was willing to do this, though she abhorred it; and though every time that she broke bread with the intruder, met his eyes, or breathed the air that he breathed, she told herself that it was intolerable, that it must end.

Once or twice, feeling the humiliation more than she could bear, she declared to her brother that the man must go. "Let him go!" she cried, in uncontrollable excitement. "Let him go!"

"But he will not be going, Flavvy."

"He must go!" she replied.

"And Morristown his?" James would answer. "Ye are forgetting! Over and above that, he 's not one to do my bidding, nor yours!"

That was true. He would not go; he persisted in remaining and being master. But it was not there the difficulty lay. If he had not made a will before he came, a will that doubtless set the property of the family forever beyond James's reach, the thing had been simple and Colonel John's shrift had been short. But now, to rid the earth of him was to place the power in the hands of a stranger, an alien, for whom the ties of family and honour would have no stringency. True, the law was weak in Kerry. A writ was one thing, and possession another

A bold man might keep the forces of law at bay for a time; but James McMurrough, notwithstanding the folly into which he had been led, was no desperado. He had no desire to live with a rope round his neck, to flee to the bog on the least alarm, and, in the issue, to give his name to an Irish Glencoe.

A position it had been hard to conceive more humiliating to a proud and untamed spirit such as Flavia's. The McMurrough found little difficulty in subduing his temper to his interests, though now and again his churlishness broke out. For Uncle Ulick, his habit was to be easy and to bid others be easy; the dawn and dark of a day reconciled him to most things. The O'Beirnes, sullen and distrustful, were still glad to escape present peril. Looking for a better time to come, they helped to shield the common enemy, supposed it policy, and felt no shame. Flavia alone, in presence of the man who had announced that he meant to be master, writhed in helpless revolt, swore that he should never be her master, swore that whoever bowed her head she never would.

And Colonel Sullivan, seated, apparently at his ease, on the steep lap of danger, found his thoughts dwelling on the one untamable person, on the one enemy who would not stoop, and whose submission seemed valuable. The others took up the positions he assigned to them, gave him lip-service, pretended that they were as they had been and he as he had been. She did not; she would not.

Presently he discovered with surprise that her attitude rendered him unhappy. Secure in his sense of right, certain that he was acting for the best, he should have been indifferent. But he was not indifferent.

Meantime, she believed that there was no length to which she would not go against him; she fancied that there was no weapon which she would not stoop to pick up if it would hurt him. And presently she was tried. A week had passed since the great fiasco. Again it was the eve of Sunday, and in the usual course of things a priest would appear to celebrate mass on the following day. This risk James was now unwilling to run. His fears painted that as dangerous which had been done safely Sunday by Sunday for years; and in a hang-dog, hesitating way, he let Flavia know his doubts.

"Devil take me if I think he 'll suffer it!" he said, kicking up the turf with his toe. They were standing together by the waterside, Flavia rebelling against the consciousness that it was only outside their own walls that they could talk freely. "May be," he continued, "it will be best to let Father O'Hara know — to let be for a week or two."

The girl turned upon him, in passionate reprehension. "Why?" she cried, "Why?"

"Why, is it you 're asking?" James answered sullenly. "Well, is n't he master for the time, bad luck to him! And if he thinks we 're beginning to draw the boys together he 'll may be put his foot down! And I 'd rather be stopping it myself, just for a week or two, Flavvy, than be bidden by him."

"Never!" she cried.

"But ——"

"Never! Never! Never!" she repeated, firmly. "Let us turn our back on our King by all means! But on our God, no! Let him do his worst!"

He was ashamed to persist, and he took another line. "I 'm thinking of O'Hara," he said. "It 'll be four walls for him, or worse, if he 's taken."

"There 's no one will be taking him," she answered steadfastly.

"But if he is?"

"I 'm saying there 's no one will be taking him."

James felt himself repulsed. He shrugged his shoulders and was silent. Presently, "Flavvy," he said in a low tone, "I 've a notion, my girl. And it 'll serve, I 'm thinking. This can't be lasting."

She looked at him without much hope.

"Well?" she said coldly. She had begun to find him out.

He looked at her cunningly. "We might put the boot on the other leg," he said. "He 's for informing. But what if we inform, my girl? It 's the first in the field that 's believed. He 's his tale of the Spanish ship, and you know who. But what if we tell it first, and say that he came with them and stayed behind to get us to move? Who 's to say he did n't land from the Spaniard, if we 're all in a tale? And faith, he 's no friend here nor one that will open his mouth for him. A word at Tralee will do it and Luke Asgill has friends there that will be glad to set the ball rolling at his bidding. Once clapped up John Sullivan may *squeal,* he 'll not be the one to be believed, but those that put him there. It 'll be no more than to swear an information, and Luke Asgill will do the rest."

Flavia shuddered. "They won't take his life?" she asked.

James frowned. "That would not suit us at all," he said. "Not at all! We could do that for ourselves. Faith," with a sudden laugh, "you did n't lack much of doing it, Flavvy! No; but a stone box and a ring round his leg, and four walls to talk to — until such time as we have a use for him, would be mighty convenient for everybody. He 'd have leisure to think of his dear relations, and of the neat way he outwitted them, the clever devil! But for taking his life — I 'm seeing my way there too," with a grin — "it was naming his dear relations made me think of it. They 'd not bear to be informing without surety for his life, to be sure! No!" with a chuckle. "And very creditable to them!"

Flavia stared across the water. She was very pale.

"We 'll be wanting one or two to swear to it," he continued, "and the rest to be silent. Sorra a bit of difficulty will there be about it!"

"But if," she said slowly, "he gets the first word? And tells the truth?"

"The truth?" James McMurrough replied scornfully. "The truth is what we 'll make it! I 'll see to that, my jewel."

She shivered. "Still," she said, "it will not be truth."

"What matter?" James answered. "It will cook his goose. Curse him," he continued with violence, "what right had he to come here and thrust himself into other folks' affairs?"

"I could have killed him," she said. "But ——"

"But you can't," he rejoined. "And you know why."

"But this" — she continued with a shudder, "this is different."

"What will you be after?" he cried impatiently. "You are not turning sheep-hearted at this time of day?"

"I am not sheep-hearted."

"What is it then, my girl?"

"I can't do this," she said. She was still very pale. Something had touched her, that had never approached her so nearly before.

He stared at her. "But he 'll have his life," he said.

"It 's not that," she answered slowly. "It 's the way. I can't!" she repeated. "I 've tried, and I can't! It sickens me."

"And he 's to do what he likes with us?" James cried.

"No, no!"

"And we 're not to touch him without our gloves?"

She did not answer, and twice her brother repeated the taunt. At last, "It 's too vile!" she cried passionately. "It 's too horrible! It 's to sink to what he is, and worse!" Her voice trembled with the intensity of her feelings — "Worse!" she repeated.

To relieve his feelings, perhaps to hide his shame, he cursed his enemy anew. And "I wish I had never told you!" he added bitterly.

"It 's too late now," she replied.

"Asgill could have managed it, and no one the wiser."

"I believe you!" she replied quickly. "But not you! Don't do it, James," she repeated, laying her hand on his arm and speaking with sudden heat. "Don't you do it! Don't!"

"And we 're to let the worst happen," he retorted, "and O'Hara perhaps be seized ——"

"God forbid!"

"That 's rubbish! And this man be seized, and that man, as he pleases! We 're to let him rule over us, and we 're to be good boys whatever happens, and serve King George and turn Protestants, every man of us!"

"God forbid!" she repeated strenuously.

"As well turn," he retorted, if we are to live slaves all our days! Cammock was right when he said that he would let no woman knit a halter for his throat!"

She did not ask him who had been the life and soul of the movement, whose enthusiasm had set it going, and whose steadfastness maintained it. She did not tell him that the issue was a hundred times more grievous to her than to him. Her eyes were beginning to be opened to his failings; but the habit of giving way to him was still strong; and when, with another volley of harsh, contemptuous words, he flung away from her, though her last interjection was a prayer to him to refrain, she blamed herself rather than him.

Now that she was alone, too, the priest's safety weighed on her mind. If Colonel John betrayed him, she would never forgive herself. Certainly it was unlikely he would;

for in that part priests moved freely, the authorities winked at their presence, and it was only within sight of the walls of Tralee or of Galway that the law which proscribed them was enforced. But her experience of Colonel Sullivan — of his activity, his determination, his adroitness — made all things seem possible. He had been firm as fate in the removal of the Bishop and Cammock; he had been turned no jot from his purpose by her prayers, her rage, her ineffectual struggles — she sickened at the remembrance of that moment. He was capable of everything, and if he thought fit — but at that point her eyes alighted on a man who was approaching along the lake-road. It was Father O'Hara himself. The priest was advancing as calmly and openly as if no law made his presence a felony, or as if no Protestant breathed the soft Irish air for a dozen leagues about.

Her brother's words had shaken Flavia's nerves. She was courageous, but she was a woman. She flew to meet the priest, and with every step his peril loomed larger before her fluttered spirits. The wretch had said that he would be master, and a master who was a Protestant, a fanatic ——

She did not follow the thought to its conclusion. She waved a warning even before she reached the father. When she did, "Father!" she cried eagerly, "you must get away, and come back after dark!"

The good man's jaw fell. He had been looking forward to good cheer and a good bed, to a rare oasis of comfort in his squalid life. He cast a wary look round him. "What has happened, my daughter?" he asked.

"Colonel Sullivan!" Flavia gasped. "He is here and he will certainly give you up."

"Colonel Sullivan?"

"Yes. You were at the Carraghalin? You have heard what happened! He will surely give you up!"

"Are the soldiers here?" the priest asked, with a blanched face.

"No, but he is here! He is in the house, and may come out at any moment," Flavia explained. "Don't you understand?"

"Did he tell you ——"

"What?"

"That he would inform?"

"No!" Flavia replied, thinking the man very dull. "But you would n't trust him?"

The priest looked round to assure himself that the landscape held no overt signs of danger. Then he brought back his eyes to the girl's face, and he stroked his thin, brown cheek reflectively. He recalled the scene in the bog, Colonel John's courage, and his thought for his servant. And at last, "I am not thinking." he said coolly, "that he will betray me. I am sure — I think I am sure," he continued, correcting himself, "that he will not. He is a heretic, but he is a good man."

Flavia's cheek flamed. She started back. "A good man!" she cried in a voice audible half a hundred yards away.

Father O'Hara looked a little ashamed of himself; but he stood by his guns. "A heretic, of course," he said.

"But, I 'm thinking, a good man. At any rate, I 'm not believing that he will inform against me."

As quickly as it had come, the colour fled from Flavia's face, and left it cold and hard. She looked at the priest as she had never looked at a priest of her Church before. "You must take your own course, then," she said. And with a gesture which he did not understand she turned from him, and leaving him, puzzled and disconcerted, she went away into the house.

A good man! Heaven and earth and the sea besides! A good man! Father O'Hara was a fool!

CHAPTER XVII

THE LIMIT

IF THERE was one man more sorry than another that the Morristown rising had been nipped in the bud it was Luke Asgill. He had honestly tried to turn James McMurrough from the attempt, though he had seen that the failure of the plot would provide his one best chance of winning Flavia. A score of times he had pictured, with rapture, the inevitable collapse. In visions he had seen the girl turn to him in the wreck of things — it might be to save her brother's life, it might be to save her tender feet from the stones of foreign streets. And in the same dream he had seen himself standing by her, alone against the world; as, to do him justice, he would have stood, no matter how sharp the stress or great the cost.

Keen therefore was his chagrin when, through the underground channels which were in his power, he heard two days after the event, and in distant Tralee, what had happened. In a moment, not only was the opportunity to which he looked forward vanished below the horizon, but news still less welcome was whispered in his ear. The man whom he had distrusted from the first had done this. More, the man was still at Morristown, if not honoured, protected, and if not openly triumphant, master in fact.

Luke Asgill swore horribly. Colonel Sullivan had got the better of him once but he was not to be duped again. He examined the matter on many sides before he took horse to see things with his own eyes. Nor did he alight at Morristown until he had made many a resolution to be on his guard.

He had reason to call these to mind before his foot was well out of the stirrup, for the first person he saw, after he had bidden his groom take the horses to the stable, was Colonel Sullivan. Asgill had time to scan his face before they met in the courtyard, and he judged that Colonel John's triumph did not go very deep. He was looking graver, sadder, older, finally — this he saw as they saluted one another — sterner.

Asgill stepped aside courteously, meaning to go by him. But the Colonel stepped aside also, and so barred his way. "Mr. Asgill," he said — and there was something of the martinet in his tone —"I will trouble you to give me a word apart."

"A word apart?" Asgill answered. He was taken aback, and do what he could the Colonel's grave eyes discomposed him. "With all the pleasure in life, Colonel. But a little later, by your leave."

"I think now were more convenient, sir," the Colonel answered, "by your leave."

"I will lay my cloak in the house, and then ——"

"It will be more convenient to keep your cloak, I 'm thinking," the Colonel rejoined with dryness. And either because of the meaning in his voice or the command in his eyes, Asgill gave way and the two walked gravely and step for step through the gateway.

Outside the Colonel beckoned to a ragged urchin who was playing ducks and drakes with his naked toes. "Go, after Mr. Asgill's horses," he said, "and bid the man bring them back.'

"Colonel Sullivan!"

The Colonel did not heed his remonstrance. "And follow us!" he continued. "Are you hearing, boy? Go, then."

"Colonel Sullivan," Asgill repeated, his face both darker and paler — for there could be no doubt about the other's meaning — "I 'm thinking this is a strange liberty you 're taking. And I beg to say I don't understand the meaning of it."

"You wish to know the meaning of it?"

"I do."

"It means, sir," Colonel John replied, "that the sooner you start on your return journey the better!"

Asgill stared. "The better you will be pleased, you mean!" he said. And he laughed harshly.

"The better it will be for you, I mean," Colonel John answered.

Asgill flushed darkly, but he commanded himself. "This is an odd tone," he said. "I must ask you to explain yourself further. I am here upon the invitation of my friend, The McMurrough ——"

"This is not his house."

Asgill stared. "Do you mean ——"

"I mean what I say," the Colonel answered. "This is not his house, as you well know."

"But ——"

"It is mine, and I do not propose to entertain you, Mr. Asgill," Colonel John continued. "Is that sufficiently plain?"

The glove was down. The two men looked at each other. Asgill was at a disadvantage. He did not know precisely how things stood. Yet if the tall, lean man, serious and growing gray, represented one form of strength, the shorter, stouter man, with the mobile face and the quick brain, stood for another. Offhand he could think of no weak spot on his side; and if he must fight, he would fight.

He forced a laugh.

"More plain than hospitable, Colonel," he said. "Perhaps, after all, it will be best so, and we shall understand one another."

"I am thinking so," Colonel Sullivan answered. It was plain that he did not mean to be drawn from the position he had taken up.

"Only I think that you have overlooked this," Asgill continued smoothly. "It is one thing to own a house and another to kick the logs on the hearth; one thing to have the deeds and another — in the west — to pass the punch-bowl! More, by token, 't is a hospitable country this, Colonel and if there is one thing would annoy The McMurrough and the young lady, his sister, more than another, it would be to turn a guest from the door — that is thought to be theirs!"

"You mean that you will not take my bidding?" the Colonel said.

"Not the least taste in life," Asgill answered gaily, "unless it is backed by the gentleman or the lady."

"Yet I believe, sir, that I have a means to persuade you," Colonel John replied. "It is no more than a week ago, Mr. Asgill, since a number of persons in my presence assumed a badge so notoriously treasonable that a child could not doubt its meaning."

"In the west of Ireland," Asgill said, with a twinkle in his eye, "that is a trifle, my dear sir, not worth naming."

"But if reported in the east?"

Asgill averted his face that its smile might not be seen. "Well," he said, "it might be a serious matter there."

"I think you take me now," Colonel John rejoined. "I wish to use no threats. The least said the soonest mended."

Asgill looked at him with the amusement of a man watching the transparent scheming of a child. "As you say, the least said the soonest mended," he rejoined. "So — who is to report it in the east?"

"I will, if necessary."

"If ——"

"If you push me to it."

Asgill raised his eyebrows impertinently. "An informer?" he said.

Colonel John did not flinch. "If necessary," he repeated.

"That would be serious," Asgill rejoined, "for many people. In the first place for the young lady, your ward, Colonel. Then for your kinsman — and Mr. Ulick Sullivan. After that for quite a number of honest gentlemen, whose only fault is a tendency to heroics after dinner. It would be so serious, and for so many, Colonel, that for my part I should be glad to suffer in such good company. Particularly," he continued, with a droll look, the droller for his appreciation of the Colonel's face of discomfiture, "as being a Protestant and a justice, I should, ten to one, be the only person against whom the story would not pass. So that, ten to one, I should go free, and the others go to Geordie's prison!"

Colonel John was fairly defeated, his flank turned, his guns captured. He had counted so surely on the man whom he knew to be a knave proving also a coward, that even his anger could not hide his discomfiture. He looked, indeed, so rueful, and at the same time so wrathful, that Asgill laughed aloud.

"Come, Colonel," he said, "it is no use to scowl at me. We know you never call any one out. Let me just hint that wits in Ireland are not quite so slow as in colder countries, and that, had I been here a week back, you had not found it so easy to ——"

"To what, sir?"

"To send two old women to sea in a cockboat," Asgill replied. And he laughed anew and loudly. But this time there was no gaiety in his laugh. If the Colonel had not performed the feat in question, in how different a state things might have been at this moment! Asgill felt murderous toward him as he thought of that; and the weapon of the flesh being out of the question — for he had no mind to face the Colonel's small-sword — he sought about for an arm of another kind. "More by token," he continued; "if you are going to turn informer, it was a pity you did not send the young woman to sea with the old ones. But I 'm thinking you 'd not be liking to be without her, Colonel?"

Colonel John turned surprisingly red. "We will leave her out of the question, sir," he said haughtily. "Or — that reminds me," he continued, with increasing sternness. "You question my right to bid you begone ——"

"I do!" Asgill cried, with zest. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

"But you forget, I think, another little matter in the past that is known to me — and that you would not like disclosed, I believe, sir."

"You seem to have been raking things up, Colonel."

"One must deal with a rogue according to his roguery," Colonel John retorted.

Asgill's face grew dark. He made a movement, but restrained himself. "You don't mince matters," he said.

"I do not."

"You may be finding it an unfortunate policy before long," Asgill said between his teeth. He was moved at last, angered, perhaps apprehensive of what was coming.

"Maybe, sir," Colonel John returned, "maybe. But in the meantime let me remind you that your tricks as a horsedealer would not go far to recommend you as a guest to my kinswoman."

"Oh?"

"Who shall assuredly hear who seized her mare if you persist in forcing your company upon her."

"Upon her?" Asgill repeated, in a peculiar tone. "I see."

Colonel John reddened. "You know now," he said. "And if you persist ——"

"You will tell her," Asgill took him up, "that I — shall I say — abducted her mare?"

"I shall tell her without hesitation."

"Or scruple?"

Colonel Sullivan glowered at him, but did not answer.

Asgill laughed a laugh of honest contempt. "And she," he said, "will not believe you if you swear it a score of times! Try, sir! You will injure yourself, you will not injure me. Why, man," he continued, in a tone of unmeasured scorn, "you are duller than I thought you were! The ice is still in your wits, and the fog in your brain. I thought, when I heard what you had done, that you were the man for Kerry! But ——"

"What is it? What 's this?"

The speaker was James McMurrough. He had approached unnoticed, and his churlish tone showed that what he had overheard was not to his liking. But Asgill supposed that James's ill-humour was directed against his enemy, and he appealed to him.

"What is it?" he answered with energy; "I 'll tell you!"

"Then you 'll be telling me indoors!" James answered curtly.

"No!" said Colonel Sullivan.

But at that the young man exploded. "No?" he cried. "No? And, why no? Confusion, sir, it 's too far you are driving us," he continued passionately. "Is it at your bidding I must stand in a mob of beggars at my own gate — I, The McMurrough? And be telling and taking for all the gossoons in the country to hear? No? But it 's yes, I say! There 's bounds to it all, and if you must be falling to words with my friends, quarrel like gentlemen within doors, and not in a parcel of loons at the gate."

He turned without waiting for a reply and strode into the courtyard. Colonel John hesitated a moment, then he stood aside, and, with a stern face, he invited Asgill to precede him. The justice did so, smiling. He had won the first bout; and now, if he was not much mistaken, his opponent had made a false move.

That opponent, following with a sombre face, began to be of the same opinion. In his simplicity he had supposed that it would be easy to bell the cat. But the cat had teeth, and claws, and the cunning of a cat, and was not, it now appeared, an animal easy to bell.

They passed into the house. There were two or three buckeens in the hall, and Darby and one of the down-at-heel serving-boys were laying the evening meal. "You 'll be getting out," James said curtly.

"We will," replied one of the men. And they trooped out at the back.

"Now, what is it?" The McMurrough asked, turning on his followers and speaking in a tone hardly more civil.

"It 's what you 're saying — Get out!" Asgill answered smiling. "Only it 's the Colonel here 's for saying it, and it seems I 'm the one to get out."

"What do you mean?" James growled. "Sorra bit of your fun am I wishing at this present!" He wanted no trouble, and he saw that here was trouble.

"I can tell you in a few words," Colonel Sullivan answered. "You know on what terms we are here. I wish to do nothing uncivil, and I was looking for this gentleman to take a hint and go quietly. He will not, it seems, and so I must say plainly what I mean. I object to his presence here."

James stared. He did not understand. "Why, man, he 's no Jacobite!" he cried. His surprise was genuine.

"I will say nothing as to that," Colonel John answered precisely.

"Then, faith, what are you saying?" James asked. Asgill stood by smiling, aware that silence would best fight his battle.

"This," Colonel John returned. "That I know those things of him that make him unfit company here."

"The deuce you do!"

"And ——"

But James's patience was at an end. "Unfit company for whom?" he cried. "Eh! Is it Darby he 'll be spoiling? Or Thaddy the lad? Or" — resentment gradually overcoming irony — "is it Phelim or Morty he 'll be tainting the souls of, and he a Protestant, like yourself? Colonel Sullivan, it 's clean out of patience you put me! Are we boys at school, to be scolded and flouted and put right by you? Unfit company? For whom? For whom, sir?"

"For your sister," Colonel John replied. "Without saying more, Mr. Asgill is not of the class with whom your grandfather ——"

"My grandfather — be hanged!" cried the angry young man. "You said you 'd be master here, and faith," he continued with bitterness, "it 's master you mean to be. But there 's a limit! By heaven, there 's a limit ——"

"Yes, James, there is a limit!" a voice struck in — a voice as angry as The McMurrough's, but vibrating to a purer note of passion; so that the indignation which it expressed seemed to raise the opposition to Colonel John's action to a higher plane. "There is a limit, Colonel Sullivan!" Flavia repeated, stepping from the foot of the stairs, on the upper flight of which — drawn from her room by the first outburst — she had heard the whole. "And it has been reached! When the head of The McMurroughs of Morristown is told on his own hearth whom he shall receive and whom he shall put to the door! Limit is it? Let me tell you, sir, I would rather be the poorest exile than live thus. I would rather beg my bread barefoot among strangers, never to see the sod again, never to hear the friendly Irish tongue, never to smell the peat reek, than live on this tenure, at the mercy of a hand I loathe, on the sufferance of a man I despise, of an informer, a traitor, ay, an apostate ——"

"Flavia! Flavia!" Colonel John's remonstrance was full of pain.

"Ah, don't call me that!" she rejoined passionately. "Don't make me hate my own name! Better a hundred times an open foe ——"

"Have I ever been anything but an open foe?" he returned.

She swept the remonstrance by. "Better," she cried, vehemently, "far better a fate we know, a lot we understand; far better freedom and poverty, than to live thus — yesterday a laughing-stock, to-day slaves; yesterday false to our vows, to-day false to our friends! Oh, there must be an end! There ——"

She choked on the word, and her distress moved Asgill to do a strange thing. He had listened to her with an admiration that for the time purified the man. Now he stepped forward. "I would rather never cross this threshold again," he cried; "never, ay, believe me, I would rather never see you again, than give you this pain! I go, dear lady, I go! And do not let one thought of me trouble or distress you! Let this gentleman have his way. I do not ask to understand how he holds you, but I shall be silent."

He seemed to the onlookers as much raised above himself as Colonel John seemed depressed below himself.

There could be no doubt with whom the victory lay: with whom the magnanimity.

But as Asgill turned on his heel Flavia found her voice. "Do not go!" she cried impulsively. "There must be an end of this!"

But Asgill insisted. He saw that to go was to commend himself to her a hundred times more seriously than if he stayed. "No," he said; "permit me to go." He stepped forward and, with a grace borrowed for the occasion, and with lips that trembled at his daring, he raised and kissed her hand. "Permit me to go, dear lady. I would rather banish myself a hundred times than bring ill into this house or differences into this family."

"Flavia!" Colonel Sullivan said, finding his voice at last, "hear first, I am begging you, what I have to say! Hear it, since against my will the matter has been brought to your knowledge."

"That last I can believe!" she cried, spitefully. "But for hearing, I choose the part this gentleman has chosen — to go from your presence. What?" looking at the Colonel with white cheeks and flaming eyes "has it come to this? That we must seek your leave to live, to breathe, to have a guest, to eat and sleep, and perhaps to die? Then I say — then I say, if this be so, we have no choice but to go. This is no place for us!"

"Flavia!"

"Ah, do not call me that!" she retorted. "My hope, joy, honour, are in this house, and you have disgraced it!

My brother is a McMurrough, and what have you made of him? He cowers before your eye! He has no will but yours! You flog us like children, but you forget that we are grown, and that it is more than the body that smarts. It is shame we feel — shame so bitter that if a look could lay you dead at my feet, though it cost us all, though it left us beggared, I would look it joyfully — were I alone! But you, a schemer living on our impotence, walk on and trample upon us ——"

"Enough," Colonel Sullivan cried, intolerable pain in his voice. "You win! You have a heart harder than the millstone, more set than ice! I call you to witness I have struggled hard ——"

"For the mastery," she cried venomously. "And for your master, the devil!"

"No," he replied, more quietly. "I think for God. If I was wrong, may he forgive me!"

"I never will!" she protested.

"I shall not ask for your forgiveness," he retorted. He looked at her silently, and then, in an altered tone, "the more," he said, "as my mind is changed again. A minute ago I was weak; now I am strong, and I will do my duty as I have set myself to do it. When I came here I came to be a peacemaker, I came to save the great from his folly, and the poor from his ignorance, to shield the house of my fathers from ruin and my kin from the jail and the gibbet. And I stand here still, and I shall persist — I shall persist."

"You will?" she exclaimed.

"I shall! I shall remain and persist."

Passion choked her. She could not find words. After all she had said he would persist. He would still trample upon them, still be master. They were to have no life, no will, no freedom — while he lived. Ah, while he lived. She made an odd gesture with her hands, and turned and went up the stairs. The worse for him!

CHAPTER XVIII

A COUNTERPLOT

LUKE ASGILL rode slowly from the gates. The McMurrough walked by his stirrup, talking rapidly—he, too, with furtive backward glances. In five minutes he had explained the situation and the Colonel's vantage ground. At the end of those minutes, "I see," Asgill said, thoughtfully. "Easy to put him under the sod! But you 're thinking him worse dead than alive."

"Sorra a doubt of it!"

"Yet the bogs are deep," Asgill returned, his tone smacking faintly of raillery. "You might deal with him first and his heir when the time came. Why not?"

"God knows!" James answered. "And I 've no taste to make the trial." Then he spoke of the will.

Asgill looked for some moments between his horse's ears, flicking his foot the while with his switch. When he spoke he proved in three or four sentences that if his will was the stronger, his cunning was also the more subtle.

"A will is revocable," he said. "Eh?"

"It is."

"And the man that 's made one may make another?"

"Who 's doubting it?"

"But you 're doubting," Asgill rejoined — and he laughed as he spoke — "that it would not be in your favour, my lad."

"Never a bit do I doubt it!" James said.

"No, but in a minute you will," Asgill answered. And stooping from his saddle, he talked for some minutes in a low tone. When he raised his head again he clapped The McMurrough on the shoulder. "There!" he said, "now won't that be doing the trick for you?"

"It 's clever," James answered, with a cruel gleam in his eyes. "It is clever! The old devil himself could n't be beating it by the length of his hoof! But ——"

"What 's amiss with it?"

"A will 's revocable," James said, with a cunning look. "And what he can do once he can do twice."

"Sorrow a doubt of that, too, if you 're innocent enough to let him make one! But you 're not, my lad. No; the will first, and then ——" Luke Asgill did not finish the sentence, but he grinned. "Anything else amiss with it?' he asked.

"No. But the devil a bit do I see why you bring Flavvy into it?"

"Don't you?"

"I do not."

Asgill drew rein, and by a gesture bade his groom ride on. No?" he said. "Well, I 'll be telling you. He 's an obstinate dog; faith, as obstinate a dog as ever walked on two legs! And left to himself he 'd, maybe, take more time and trouble to come to where we want him than we can spare. But I 'm thinking, James McMurrough, that he 's sweet on your sister!"

The McMurrough stared. "It 's jesting you are?" he said.

"It 's the last thing I 'd jest about," Asgill answered sombrely. "It is so; whether she knows it or not, I know it! And so d' you see, if she 's in this, 't will do more — take my word for it that know — to break him down and draw the heart out of him, so that he 'll care little one way or the other, than anything you can do yourself!"

James McMurrough's face reflected his admiration. "If you 're in the right," he said, "I 'll say it for you, Asgill, you 're the match of the old one for cleverness. But do you think she 'll come to it, the jewel?"

"She will."

James shook his head. "I 'm not thinking it," he said.

"Are you not?" Asgill answered, and his face fell and his voice was anxious. "And why?"

"Sure and why? I 'll tell you. It was but a day or two ago I 'd a plan of my own. It was just to swear the plot upon him; swear he 'd come off the Spanish ship, and the rest, d' you see, and get him clapped in Tralee jail in my place. More by token, I was coming to you to help in it. But I thought I 'd need the girl to swear to it, and when I up and told her she was like a hen you 'd take the chickens from!"

Asgill was silent for a moment. Then, "You asked her to do that?" he said, in an odd tone.

"Just so."

"And you 're wondering she did n't do it?"

"I am."

"And I 'm thankful she 'd not be doing it!" Asgill retorted.

"Oh!" James exclaimed. "You 're mighty particular all in a minute, Mr. Asgill. But if not that, why this. Eh? Why this?"

"For a reason you 'd not be understanding," Asgill answered, coolly. "But I know it myself in my bones. She 'll do this if she 's handled. But there 's a man that 'll not be doing it at all, at all, and that 's Ulick Sullivan. You 'll have to be rid of him for a time, and how I 'm not saying."

"I 'll be planning that."

"And still there 's a thing you must be planning, my lad. It 's only to a Protestant he can leave it, and you must have one ready. Now if I ——"

"No!" James cried, with sudden energy. And he drew back a step, and looked the other in the face. "No, Mr. Asgill," he continued; "if it is to that you 've been working, I 'd as soon him as you! Ay, I would! I 'd sooner turn myself!"

"I can believe that."

"A hundred times sooner!" James repeated. "And what for not? What 's to prevent me? Eh? What 's to prevent me?"

"Your sister," Asgill answered.

James's face, which had flamed with passion, lost its colour.

"Your sister," Asgill repeated with gusto. "I'd like fine to see you asking her to help you turn Protestant! Faith, and, for a mere word of that same, I'll warrant she'd treat you as the old gentleman treated you!"

"Anyway, I'll not trust you," James replied, with venom. "Sooner than that I'll have — ay, that will do finely — I'll have Constantine Hussey of Duppa. He's holder for three or four already, and the whole country calls him honest! I'll have him and be safe."

"You'll do as you please about that," Asgill answered equably. "Only, mind you, I don't use my wits for nothing. If the estate's to be yours, Flavia's to be mine — if she's willing."

"Willing or unwilling for what I care!" James answered brutally.

Asgill did not hide his scorn. "An excellent brother!" he said. "And so, good day to you."

The McMurrough watched the rider go, and twice he shook his fist after him.

"Marry my sister, you dog," he muttered. "Ay, if it will give me my place again! But for helping you to the land first and to her afterward, as you'd have me, you schemer, you bog-trotter, it would make Tophet's dog sick! You son of an upstart! You'd marry my sister, would you? It will be odd if I don't jink you yet, when I've made my use of you! I'm a schemer too, Mister Asgill, only — one at a time. The Colonel first, and you afterward! Ay, you afterward, brother-in-law!"

With a last gesture of defiance he returned to the house.

It was two or three days after this interview that Colonel Sullivan, descending at the breakfast hour, found Flavia in the room. He saw her with surprise, for during those three days the girl had not sat at meals with him. Once or twice his entrance had surprised her, but it had been the signal for her departure; and he had seen no more of her than the back of her head or the tail of her gown. More often he had found the men alone and had sat down with them. Far from resenting this avoidance, he had found it proper. He suffered it patiently, and hoped that by steering a steady course he would gradually force her to change her opinion of him.

That she was already beginning to change he could scarcely hope; yet, when he saw on this morning that she meant to abide his coming, he was secretly and absurdly elated.

She was at the window, but turned on hearing his step. "I am wishing to speak to you," she said. But her unforgiving eyes looked out of a hard-cut face, and her figure was stiff as a sergeant's cane.

After that he did not try to compass a commonplace greeting. He bowed gravely. "I am ready to listen," he answered.

"I am wanting to give you a warning," she said. "Your man Bale does not share the immunity which you have secured, and if you 'll be taking my advice you will send him away. My uncle is riding as far as Mallow; he will be absent ten days. If you think fit, you will allow your man to go with him. The interval may"—she halted as if in search of a word, but her eyes did not leave his —"I do not say it will, but it may mend matters."

"I am obliged to you," he answered. Then he was silent, reflecting.

"You are not wishing," she said, with a touch of contempt, " to expose the man to a risk you do not run yourself?"

"Heaven forbid!" he answered. "But ——"

"If you think he is a protection to you," she continued in the same tone, "do not send him."

"He is not that," he replied, unmoved by her taunt. "But I am alone, and he is a comfort to me."

"As you please," she answered.

"Nevertheless he shall go," he continued. "It may be for the best." He was thinking that if he rejected this overture, she might make no other. "In any case," he added, "I thank you."

She did not deign to answer, but turned and went out. On the threshold she met a serving-boy and she paused so that the Colonel caught a momentary glimpse of her face. It wore a strange look, of disgust or of horror — he was not sure which — that appalled him; so that when the door closed upon her, he remained gazing at it. Had he misread the look? Or — what was its meaning? Could it be that she hated him to that degree! He was in a brown study when Uncle Ulick came in and confirmed the story of his journey.

"You had better come with me," he said. "I shall lie at Tralee one night, and at Ross Castle one night, and at Mallow the third."

But Colonel John had set his course, and was resolved to abide by it. After breakfast he saw Bale, and the man consented to go — with forebodings at which his master affected to smile.

"None the less I misdoubt them," the man said, sticking to his point. "I misdoubt them, your honour. They were never so careful for me," he added grimly, "when they were for piking me in the bog!"

"The young lady had naught to do with that," Colonel John replied.

"The deuce take me if I know!"

"Nonsense, man!" the Colonel said sharply. "I 'll not hear such words."

"But why separate us, your honour?" Bale pleaded. "Not for good, I swear. No, not for good!"

"For your greater safety, I hope."

"Oh, ay, I understand that! But what of your honour's?"

"I have explained to you," the Colonel said patiently, "why I am safe here."

"For my part, and that's flat, I hate their blarney!" the man burst out. "It 's everything to please you while they sharpen the pike to stick in your back."

"Hush!" Colonel John cried, sternly. "And, for my sake, keep your tongue between your teeth. Be more prudent, man!"

"It's my belief I 'll never see your honour again!" the man cried, with passion. "That 's my belief and you 'll not stir it."

"We 've parted before in worse hap," Colonel John answered, "and come together again. We 'll do the same this time."

The man did not answer, but for the rest of the day he clung to his master like a burr, and it was with an unusual sinking of the heart that Colonel John saw him ride away on the morrow. With him went Uncle Ulick, the Colonel's other friend in the house; and certainly the departure of these two seemed unlucky. But the man who was left behind was not one to give way to vain fears. He chid himself for a presentiment that belittled Providence. Perhaps, in the depths of his heart, he welcomed a change, finding cheer in the thought that the smaller the household at Morristown, the more prominently, and therefore the more fairly, he must stand in Flavia's view.

Be that as it might, he saw nothing of her on that day or the following day. But though she shunned him, others did not. He began to remark that he was seldom alone. James and the O'Beirnes were always at his elbow — watching, it seemed to him. They said little, but if he came out of his chamber he found one in the passage, and if he mounted to it one forewent him! This dogging, this endless watching, would have got on the nerves of a more timid man; it began to disturb him. He began to fancy that even Darby and the serving-boys looked askance at him and kept him in view. Once he took a notion that the butler, who had been friendly within limits, wished to say something to him. But at the critical moment Morty O'Beirne popped up from somewhere, and Darby sneaked off in silence.

The Colonel thought that he would give Morty a chance of speaking. "Are you looking for your brother?" he asked suavely.

"I am not," Morty answered, with a gloomy look.

"Nor for The McMurrough?"

"I am not. I am thinking," he added, with a grin, "that he has his hands full with the young lady."

Colonel John was startled. "What 's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, two minds in a house. Sorrow a bit more than that. It 's no very new thing in a family," Morty added. And he went out whistling "'T was a' for our rightful King." But he went, as the Colonel noted, no farther than the courtyard, whence he could command the room through the window. He lounged there, whistling, and now and again peeping.

Suddenly, on the upper floor, Colonel John heard a door open, and the clamour of a voice raised in anger. It was James's voice. "Tell him? Curse me if you shall!" Colonel John heard him say. The next moment the door was sharply closed and he caught no more.

But he had heard enough to quicken his pulses. What was it she wished to tell him? Was she seeking to follow up the hint which she had given him on Bale's behalf? And was the surveillance to which he had been subjected for the last two days aimed at keeping them apart?

Colonel John suspected that this might be so; and his heart beat more quickly. At the evening meal he was early in the room, on the chance that she might appear before the others. But she did not descend, and the meal proved unpleasant beyond the ordinary, James drinking more than was good for him, and taking a tone brutal and churlish. For some reason, the Colonel reflected, the young man was beginning to lose his fears. Why? What was he planning?

"Secure as I seem, I must look to myself," Colonel John thought. And he slept that night with his door bolted and a loaded pistol under his pillow. Next morning he took care to descend early, on the chance of seeing Flavia before the others appeared. She was not down; he waited, and she did not come. But when he had been in the room five minutes a serving-girl slipped in at the back, showed him a scared face, held out a scrap of paper and, when he had taken it, fled in a panic without a word.

He hid the paper about him and read it later. The message was in Flavia's hand; neither James nor the O'Beirnes were capable of penning a grammatical sentence. Colonel John's spirits rose as he read the note.

"*Be at the old Tower an hour after sunset. You must not be followed.*"

"That is more easily said than done," he commented.

Nor did he see how it was to be done. He stood, cudgelling his brains to evolve a plan. But he found none that might not, by awakening James's suspicions, make matters worse. He had at last to let things take their course, in the hope that when the time came they would shape themselves favourably.

They did. For before noon he gathered that James wanted to go fishing. The O'Beirnes also wanted to go fishing, and for the general convenience it became him to go with them. He said neither No nor Yes; but he dallied with the idea until it was time to start and they had made up their minds that he was coming. Then he declined.

James swore, the O'Beirnes scowled at him and grumbled. Presently the three went outside and held a conference. His hopes rose as he sat smiling to himself, for their next step was to call Darby. Evidently they gave him orders and left him in charge, for a few minutes later they went off, spending their anger on one another and on the barefoot gossoons who carried the tackle.

Late in the afternoon Colonel John took up his position on the horse-block; there he affected to be busy plaiting horse-hair lines. Every two or three minutes Darby showed himself at the door; once in a quarter of an hour the old man found occasion to cross the court to count the ducks or rout a trespassing beggar. Toward sunset he came less often, having to busy himself with the evening meal. The Colonel smiled and waited, and presently the butler came again, found him still seated there, and withdrew — this time with an air of finality. "He 's satisfied," the Colonel muttered, and the next moment he was gone also. The light was waning fast, night was falling in the valley. Before he had travelled a hundred yards he was lost to view.

When he had gone a quarter of a mile he halted and listened, with his ear near the ground, for the beat of pursuing footsteps. He heard none, nor any sounds but the low of a cow whose calf was being weaned, the "Whoo! hoo! hoo!" of owls beginning to mouse beside the lake, and the creak of oars in a boat which darkness already hid. He straightened himself with a sigh of relief, and hastened at speed in the direction of the waterfall.

Before he stood on the platform and made out the shape of the Tower looming dark and huge above him, he had come to the conclusion that the need which forced Flavia to such a place at such an hour must be great. The moon would not rise before eleven o'clock, the last shimmer of the water had faded into unfathomable blackness beneath him; he had to tread softly and with care to avoid the brink.

He peered about him, hoping to see her figure emerge beside him. He did not, and disappointed, he coughed. Finally, in a subdued voice, he called her by name, once and twice. Alas! only the wind, softly stirring the grass and whispering in the ivy, answered him. He was beginning to think that she had failed to come, when, at no great distance before him, he fancied some one moved. He groped his way forward half a dozen paces, found a light break on his view, and stood in astonishment.

The movement had carried him beyond the face of the Tower, and so revealed the light, which issued from a doorway situate in the flank of the building. He paused; but second thoughts reassured him. He saw that in that position the light was not visible from the lake or the house; and he moved quickly to the open door, expecting to see Flavia. Three steps led down to the basement room of the Tower; great was his surprise when he saw below him in this remote, abandoned building — in this room three feet below the level of the soil — a table set handsomely with four lighted candles in tall sticks, and furnished besides with a silver inkhorn, pens, and paper. Beside the table stood a couple of chairs and a stool. Doubtless there was other furniture in the room, but in his astonishment he saw only these.

He uttered an exclamation and descended the steps. "Flavia!" he cried. "Flavia!" He did not see her, and he moved a pace toward that part of the room which the door hid from him.

Crash! The door fell to, dragged by an unseen hand. Colonel John sprang toward it; but too late. He heard the grating of a rusty key turned in the lock; he heard through one of the loopholes the sound of an inhuman laugh; and he knew that he was a prisoner. In that moment the cold air of the vault struck a chill to his bones; but it struck not so cold nor so death-like as the knowledge struck to his heart that Flavia had duped him. Yes, before the crash of the closing door had ceased to echo in the stone vaulting, he knew that, he felt that! She had tricked him. He let his chin sink on his breast. Oh, the pity of it!

CHAPTER XIX

PEINE FORTE ET DURE

FOR many minutes Colonel John sat motionless in the chair into which he had sunk, his eyes fixed on the flames of the candles. His unwinking gaze created about each tongue of flame strange effects of vapour, halo-like circles that widened and again contracted, colours that came and went. But he saw these things with his eyes without seeing them with his mind. It was not of them, it was not of the death-cold room about him, it was not of anything within sight he was thinking; but of Flavia!

Of Flavia, who had deceived him, duped him, cajoled him. Who, by affecting a quarrel with her brother, had thrown him off his guard, and won his confidence, only to betray it. Who, having lured him thither, had laughed — had laughed! As he sat and thought of her treachery, he looked years older. It cut him to the heart.

At length, with a sigh drawn from his very soul, he roused himself, and, taking a candle, he made the round of the chamber. The door by which he had entered was the only outlet, and it was of stout oak, clamped with iron, and locked. For windows, a pair of loopholes, slits so narrow that on the brightest day the room must be twilit, pierced the wall toward the lake.

The walls were two feet thick, and the groined roof was of stone, hard as the weathering of centuries had left it. But not so hard, not so cruel as her heart! Flavia! The word almost came from his lips in a cry of pain.

Yet what was her purpose? He had been lured hither: but why? His eyes fell on the table; the answer would doubtless be found among the papers that lay on it. He sat down in the chair set before it, and took up the first sheet that came to hand, a note of a dozen lines in her handwriting.

"Sir," so it ran, —

"You have betrayed us; and, were that all, I 'd still be finding it in my heart to forgive you. But you have betrayed also our country, our King, and our faith; and for this it 's not with me it lies to pardon. Over and above, you have thought to hold us in a web that would make you safe at once in your life and your person; but you are meshed in your turn, and will fare as you can, without water, food, or fire, until you have signed and sealed the grant which lies beside this paper. We 're not unmerciful; and one will visit you once in twenty-four hours until he has it under your hand, when he will witness it. That done, you will go where you please; and heaven forgive you. I, who write this, am, though unjustly, the owner of that you grant, and you do no wrong.

"Flavia McMurrough."

He read the letter with a mixture of emotions. Beside it lay a deed, engrossed on parchment, which purported to grant all that he held under the will of the late Sir Michael McMurrough to Constantine Hussey, Esquire, of Duppa. But annexed to the deed was a separate scroll, illegal but not unusual in Ireland at that day, stating that the true meaning was that the lands should be held by Constantine Hussey for the use of The McMurrough, who, as a Roman Catholic, was not capable of taking them in his own name.

Fully, only too fully, enlightened by Flavia's letter, Colonel John barely glanced at the parchments; for, largely as these bulked on the table, the gist of all lay in the letter. He had fallen into a trap — a trap as cold, cruel, heartless as the bosom of her who had decoyed him hither. Without food or water! And already the chill of the earthen floor was eating into his bones, already the damp of a hundred years was creeping over him.

He sat gazing at the paper with dull eyes. For, after all, whose interests had he upheld? Whose cause had he supported against James McMurrough and his friends? For whose sake had he declared himself master at Morristown, with no intention, no thought, as heaven was his witness, of deriving one jot or one tittle of advantage for himself? Flavia's! And she had planned this! She had consigned him to this, playing to its crafty end the farce that had blinded him!

His mind travelled back to the beginning of it all; to the day on which Sir Michael's letter, with a copy of his will, had reached his hands, at Stralsund on the Baltic, in his quarters beside the East Gate. The cast of his thoughts at the reading rose up before him. The recollections of his home, his boyhood, his father, which the old man's writing had evoked, and the firmness with which, touched by the dead man's confidence, he had resolved to protect the girl's interests, that the old man's confidence should be justified, the young girl's inheritance secured to her — this had been the purpose in his mind from first to last.

And this was his reward!

True, that purpose would not have embroiled him with her if it had not become entwined with another — with the resolve to pluck her and hers from the abyss into which they were bent on flinging themselves. It was that resolution which had made her his enemy to this point. But he could not regret that — he who had seen war in all its cruel phases, and fierce rebellions, and more cruel repressions. Perish — though he perished himself in this cold prison — perish the thought! For even now some heat was kindled in him by the reflection that, whatever befell him, he had saved scores from misery, a countryside from devastation, women and children from the worst of fates. And though he never saw the sun again, he would at least pass beyond with full hands, and with the knowledge that for every life he, the soldier of fortune, had taken, he had saved ten.

At the end of two hours he roused himself. He was very cold, and that could only be mended by such exercise as the size of his prison permitted. He set himself to walk briskly up and down. When he had taken a few turns, however, he paused with his eyes on the table. The candles? They would serve him the longer if he burned but one at a time. He extinguished three. The deed? He might burn it, and so put the temptation, which he was too wise to despise, out of reach. But he had noticed in one corner a few half-charred fragments of wood, damp indeed, but such as might be kindled by coaxing. He would preserve the deed for the purpose of kindling the wood; and the fire, as his only luxury, he would postpone until he needed it more sorely. In the end the table and the chairs — or all but one should eke out his fuel; and he would sleep. But not yet.

He had no desire to die; and with warmth he knew that he could put up for a long time with the lack of food. Every hour during which he had the strength and courage to bear up against privation increased his chances; it was impossible to say what might not happen with time. Uncle Ulick was due to return in a week — and Bale. Or his jailers might relent. Nay, they must relent for their own sakes, if he bore a stout heart and held out; for until the deed was signed they dared not let him perish.

That was a good thought. They could put him on the rack, but they dared not push the torment so far as to endanger his life. He must tighten his belt, he must eke out his fuel, he must bear equably the pangs of appetite; after all, in comparison with the perils and privations through which he had passed on the cruel plains of Eastern

Europe, and among a barbarous people, this was a small thing.

Or it would have been a small thing if that sadness at the heart which had held him motionless so long had not still bowed his head upon his breast. A small thing! a few hours, a few days even of hunger and cold and physical privation — no more! But when it was overpast, and he had suffered and was free, to what could he look forward? What prospect stretched beyond, save one gray, dull, and sunless, a homeless middle age, an old age without solace? He was wounded in the house of his friend, and felt not the pain only, but the sorrow. In a little while he would remember that, if he had not to take, he had still to give: if he had not to enjoy, he had still to do. Already shadowy plans rose before him.

His had been a mad fancy, a foolish fancy, a fancy of which — for how many years rolled between him and the girl, and how many things done, suffered, seen — he should have known the outcome. But it had mastered him slowly, not so much against his will as without his knowledge; until he had awakened one day to find himself possessed by a madness, the more powerful because he was no longer young. By and by, for a certainty, the man's sense of duty, the principles that had ruled him so long, would assert themselves. He would go back to the Baltic lands, the barren, snow-bitten lands of his prime, a grayer, older, more sombre — but not an unhappy man.

Something of this he told himself as he paced up and down the gloomy chamber, while the flame of the candle crept steadily downward. It must be midnight; it must be two; it must be three in the morning. The loopholes, when he stood between them and the candle, were growing gray; the birds were beginning to chirp. Presently the sun would rise, and through the narrow windows he would see its beams flashing on the distant water. But the windows looked north-west, and many hours must pass before a ray would strike into his dungeon.

The candle was beginning to burn low, and it seemed a pity to light another, with the daylight peering in. But if he did not, he would lack the means to light his fire. And he was eager to do without the fire as long as possible. He was cold now, but he would be colder by and by, and his need of the fire would be greater.

From that the time wore wearily on to the breakfast hour. The sun was high now; the birds were singing sweetly in the rough brakes and brambles about the Tower; far away on the shining lake, of which only the farther end lay within his sight, three men were fishing from a boat. He watched them; now and again he caught the tiny splash as they flung the bait far out. So watching, with no thought or expectation of it, he fell asleep, and slept, for five or six hours, the sleep of which excitement had cheated him through the night. In warmth, morning and evening, night and day differed little in that sunken room. Still the air in it profited a little by the high sun; and he awoke, not only less weary, but warmer. But, alas! he awoke also hungry.

He stood up and stretched himself; and, seeing that two-thirds of the second candle had burned away while he slept, he was thankful that he had lit it. He tried to put away the visions of hot bacon, cold round, and sweet brown bread that rose before him. He wondered how far the plot would be carried; and thus mind got the better of body, and he forgot his appetite in a thought more engrossing.

Would she come? Every twenty-four hours, her letter said, a person would visit him. Would she be the person? It was wonderful with what interest, nay, with what agitation, he dwelt on this. How would she look? how would she bear herself? how would she meet his eye? Would she shun his gaze, or would she face it without flinching, with a steady colour and a smiling lip? If the latter were the case, would it be the same when hours and days of fasting had hollowed his cheeks, and given to his eyes the glare which he had seen in many a wretched peasant's eyes in those distant lands? Would she still be able to view his sufferings without a qualm, and turn, firm in her cruel purpose, from the dumb pleading of his hunger?

"God forbid!" he cried. "Ah! God forbid!"

And he prayed that, rather than have that last proof of hardness of heart, he might not see her at all. Yet, so weak are men — to see her come, to see how she bore herself, was now the one hope that had power to lighten the time, and keep at bay the attacks of hunger! He had fasted twenty-four hours.

The thought possessed him to an extraordinary extent. Would she come? Or, having lured him into his enemies' power, would she leave him to be treated as they chose, while she lay warm and safe in the house which his interference had saved for her?

Oh! cruel!

Then the very barbarity of an action so unwomanly suggested that, viewed from her side, it must wear another shape. What was this girl gaining? Revenge, yes; yet, if they kept faith with him, and, the deed signed, let him go free, she had not even revenge. For the rest, she lost by the deed. All that her grandfather had meant for her passed by it to her brother. To lend herself to stripping herself was not the part of a selfish woman. Even in her falseness there was something magnanimous.

He was still staring dreamily at the table when a shadow falling on the table roused him. He lifted his eyes to the nearest loophole, through which the setting sun had been darting its rays a moment before. Morty O'Beirne bending almost double — for outside, the arrow-slit was not more than two feet from the ground — was peering in.

"Ye 'll not have changed your quarters, Colonel," he said, in a tone of raillery which was assumed perhaps to hide a real feeling of shame. "Sure, you 're there, Colonel, safe enough?"

"Yes, I am here," Colonel John answered austerely. He did not leave his seat at the table.

"And as much at home as a mole in a hill," Morty continued. "And, like that same blessed little fellow in black velvet that I take my hat off to, with lashings of time for thinking."

"So much," Colonel John answered, with the same severe look, "that I am loth to think ill of any. Are you alone, Mr. O'Beirne?"

"Faith, and who 'd there be with me?" Morty answered in true Irish fashion.

"I cannot say. I ask only, are you alone?"

"Then I am, and that 's the truth," Morty replied, peering inquisitively into the corners of the gloomy chamber. "More by token I wish you no worse than just to be doing as you 're bid — and faith, it 's but what 's right! — and go your way. 'T is a cold, damp, unchancy place you 've chosen, Colonel," he continued, with a grin; "like nothing in all the wide world so much as that same molehill. Well, glory be, it can't be said I 'm one for talking; but, if you 're asking my advice, you 'll be wiser acting first than last, and full than empty!"

"I 'm not of that opinion, sir," Colonel John replied, looking at him with the same stern eyes.

"Then I 'm thinking you 're not as hungry as I 'd be! And not the least taste in life to stay my stomach for twenty-four hours!"

"It has happened to me before," Colonel John answered.

"You 're not for signing then?"

"I am not."

"Don't be saying that, Colonel!" Morty rejoined. "It's not yet awhile, you 're meaning?"

"Neither now nor ever." Colonel John answered. "I quote from yourself, sir. As well say it first as last, and full as empty!"

"Sure, and ye 'll be thinking better of it by and by, Colonel."

"No."

"Ah, you will," Morty retorted, in that tone which to a mind made up is worse than a blister. "Sure, ye 'll not be so hard-hearted, Colonel, as to refuse a lady! It 's not Kerry-born you are, and say the word 'No' that easy!"

"Do not deceive yourself, sir," Colonel John answered severely, and with a darker look. "I shall not give way either to-day or to-morrow."

"Nor the next day?"

"Nor the next day."

"Not if the lady asks you herself? Come, Colonel."

Colonel John rose sharply from his seat; such patience, as a famished man has, come to an end.

"Sir," he said, "if this is all you have to say to me, I have your message, and I prefer to be alone."

Morty grinned at him a moment, then with an Irish shrug, he gave way. "As you will," he said.

He withdrew himself suddenly, and the sunset light darted into the room through the narrow window, dimming the candle's rays. The Colonel heard him laugh as he strode away across the platform and down the hill. A moment and the sounds ceased. He was gone. The Colonel was alone.

Until this time to-morrow! Twenty-four hours. Yes, he must tighten his belt.

Morty, poking his head this way and that, peering into the chamber as he had peered yesterday, wished he could see Colonel John's face. But Colonel John, bending resolutely over the handful of embers that glowed in an inner angle of the room, showed only his back. Even that Morty could not see plainly; for the last of the candles had burned out, and in the chamber, dark in comparison with the open air, the crouching figure was no more than a shapeless mass obscuring the glow of the fuel.

Morty shaded his eyes and peered more closely. He was not a sensitive person, and he was obeying orders. But he was not quite comfortable.

"And that 's your last word?" he said slowly. "Come, Colonel dear, ye 'll say something more to that."

"That 's my last word to-day," Colonel John answered as slowly, and without turning his head.

"Honour bright? Won't ye think better of it before I go?"

"I will not."

Morty paused, to tell the truth, in extreme exasperation. He had no great liking for the part he was playing; but why could n't the man be reasonable? "You 're sure of it, Colonel," he said.

Colonel John did not answer.

"And I 'm to tell her so?" Morty concluded.

Colonel John rose sharply, as if at last the other tried him too far. "Yes," he said, "tell her that! Or," lowering his voice and his hand, "do not tell her, as you please. That is my last word, sir! Let me be."

But it was not his last word. For as Morty turned to go, the Colonel heard him speak — in a lower and a different tone. At the same moment, or his eyes deceived him, a shadow that was not Morty O'Beirne's fell for one second on the splayed wall inside the window. It was gone as soon as seen; but Colonel John had seen it, and he sprang to the window.

"Flavia!" he cried. "Flavia!"

He paused to listen, his hand on the wall on either side of the opening. His face, which had been pinched and haggard a moment before, was now flushed by the sunset. Then "Flavia!" he repeated, keen appeal in his voice. "Flavia!"

She did not answer. She was gone. And perhaps it was as well. He listened for a long time, but in vain; and he told himself again that it was as well. Why, after all, appeal to her? How could it avail him? Slowly he went back to his chair and sat down in the old attitude over the embers. But his lip quivered.

CHAPTER XX

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

A LITTLE before sunset on that same day two men stood beside the entrance at Morristown They were staring at a third, who, seated nonchalantly upon the horse-block, slapped his boot with his riding switch, and made as poor a show of hiding his amusement as they of masking their disgust. The man who slapped his leg and shaped his lips to a silent whistle, was Major Payton of the —th. The men who looked at him, and cursed the unlucky star which had brought him thither, were Luke Asgill and The McMurrough.

"Faith, and I should have thought," Asgill said, with a clouded face, "that my presence here, Major, and I, a justice ——"

"True for you!" Payton said, with a grin.

"Should have been enough by itself, and the least taste more than enough, to prove the absurdity of the Castle's story."

"True for you again," Payton replied. "And ain't I saying that but for your presence here, and a friend at court that I 'll not name, it 's not your humble servant this gentleman would be entertaining" — he turned to The

McMurrough — "but half a company and a sergeant's guard!"

"I 'm allowing it."

"You 've no cause to do other."

"Nary a bit I 'm denying it," Asgill replied more amicably; and, as far as he could, he cleared his face. "It 's not that you 're not welcome. Not at all, Major! Sure, and I 'll answer for it, my friend The McMurrough is glad to welcome any English gentleman, much more one of your reputation."

"Truth, and I am," The McMurrough assented. But he had not Asgill's self-control, and his sulky tone belied his words.

"Still — I come at an awkward time, perhaps?" Payton answered, looking with a grin from one to the other.

Partly to tease Asgill, whom he did not love the more because he owed him money, and partly to see the rustic beauty whom, rumour had it, Asgill was courting in the wilds, he had volunteered to do with three or four troopers what otherwise a half-company would have been sent to do. That he could at the same time put his creditor under an obligation, and annoy him, had not been the least part of the temptation; while no one at Tralee believed the story sent down from Dublin.

"Eh! An awkward time, perhaps?" he repeated, looking at The McMurrough. "Sorry, I 'm sure, but ——"

"I 'd have entertained you better, I 'm thinking," James McMurrough said, "if I 'd known you were coming before you came."

"Devil a doubt of it!" said Asgill, whose subtle brain had been at work. "Not that it matters, bedad, for an Irish gentleman will do his best. And to-morrow Colonel Sullivan, that 's more knowledge of the mode and foreign ways, will be back, and he 'll be helping his cousin. More by token," he added, in a different tone, "you know him of old?"

Payton, who had frowned at the name, reddened at the question. "Is that," he asked, "the Colonel Sullivan who ——"

"Who tried the foils with Lemoine at Tralee?" Asgill cried heartily. "The same and no other! He is away to-day, but he 'll be returning to-morrow, and he 'll be delighted to see you! And by good luck, there are foils in the house, and he 'll pass the time pleasantly with you. It 's he 's the hospitable creature!"

Payton was anything but anxious to see the man whose skill had turned the joke against him; and his face betokened his feelings. Had he foreseen the meeting he would have left the job to a subaltern. "Hang it!" he exclaimed, vexed by the recollection, "a fine mess you led me into there, Asgill!"

"I did not know him then," Asgill replied lightly. "And, pho! Take my word for it, he 's no man to bear malice!"

"Malice, begad!" Payton answered, ill-humouredly; "I think it 's I ——"

"Ah, you are right again, to be sure!" Asgill agreed, laughing silently. For already he had formed a hope that the guest might he manœuvred out of the house on the morrow. He knew Payton. He knew the man's arrogance, the contempt in which be held the Irish, his view of them as an inferior race. He was sure that, if he saw Flavia and fancied her, he was capable of any outrage; or, if he learned her position in regard to the estate, he might prove a formidable, if an honourable, competitor. In either case, to hasten the man's departure, and to induce Flavia to remain in the background in the meantime, became Asgill's chief aim.

James McMurrough, on the other hand, saw in the unwelcome intruder an English officer; and, troubled by his guilty conscience, he dreaded above all things what he might discover. True, the past was past, the plot spent, the Spanish ship gone. But the Colonel remained, and in durance. And if by any chance the Englishman stumbled on him, heard his story, and lived to carry it back to Tralee — the consequences might be such that a cold sweat broke out on the young man's brow at the thought of them. To add to his alarm, Payton, whose mind was secretly occupied with the Colonel, sought to evince his indifference by changing the subject, and in doing so, hit on one singularly unfortunate.

"A pretty fair piece of water," he said, rising with an affected yawn. "The tower at the head of it — it 's grown too dark to see it — is it inhabited?"

The McMurrough started guiltily. "The tower?" he stammered. Could it be that the man knew all, and was here to expose him? His heart stood still, then raced.

"The Major 'll be meaning the tower on the rock," Asgill said smoothly, but with a warning look. "Ah, sure, it 'll be used at times, Major, for a prison, you understand."

"Oh!"

"But we 'll be better to be moving inside, I 'm thinking," he continued.

Payton assented. He was still brooding on his enemy, the Colonel. Curse the man, he was thinking. Why could n't he keep out of his way?

"Take the Major in, McMurrough," Asgill said, who feared Flavia and Morty O'Beirne might arrive from the Tower. "You 'll like to get rid of your boots before supper, Major?" he went on. "Bid Darby send the Major's man to him, McMurrough; or, better, I 'll be going to the stables myself and I 'll be telling him!"

As the others went in, Asgill strolled toward the stables. But when they had passed out of sight he turned and walked along the lake to meet the girl and her companion. As he walked he had time to decide how he might best deal with Flavia, and how much he should tell her. When he met them, therefore — by this time the night was falling — his first question related to that which an hour before had been the one pre-occupation of all their minds.

"Well," he said, "he 'll not have yielded yet, I am thinking?"

Dark as it was, the girl averted her face to hide the trouble in her eyes. She shook her head. "No," she said, "he has not."

"I did not count on it," Asgill replied cheerfully. "But time — time and hunger and patience — not a doubt he 'll give in presently."

She did not answer, but he fancied — she kept her face averted — that she shivered.

"While you have been away, something has happened," he continued. After all, it was perhaps as well, he reflected, that Payton had come. His coming, even if Flavia did not encounter him, would prevent her dwelling too long on that room in the Tower, and on the man who famished there. She hated the Colonel, Asgill believed. She had hated him, he was sure. But how long would she continue to hate him in these circumstances? How long if she learned what were the Colonel's feelings toward her? "An unwelcome guest has come," he continued glibly, "and one that 'll be giving trouble, I 'm fearing."

"A guest?" Flavia repeated in astonishment. She halted. What time for guests was this? "And unwelcome?" she added. "Who is it?"

"An English officer," Asgill explained, "from Tralee. He is saying that the Castle has heard something, and has sent him here to look about him."

Naturally the danger seemed greater to the two than to Asgill, who knew his man. Words of dismay broke from Flavia and O'Beirne. "From Tralee?" she cried. "And an English officer? Good heavens! Do you know him?"

"I do," Asgill answered confidently. "And I can manage him. I hold him, like that, not the least doubt of it; but the less we 'll be doing for him the sooner he 'll be going, and the safer we 'll be! I would not be so bold as to advise," he continued diffidently, "but I 'm thinking it would be no worse if you left him to be entertained by the men."

"I will!" she cried. "Why should I be wanting to see him?"

"Then I think he 'll be ordering his horse to-morrow!"

"I wish he were gone now!" she cried.

"Ah, so do I!" he replied, from his heart.

"I will go in through the garden," she said.

He assented. She turned aside, and for a moment he bent to the temptation to go with her. He was sure that she had begun, not only to suffer his company, but to suffer it willingly. And here, as she passed through the darkling garden, was an opportunity of making a further advance. She would have to grope her way, a reason for taking her hand might offer, and — his head grew hot at the thought.

But he thrust the temptation from him. He knew that it was not only the stranger's presence that weighed her down, but her recollection of the man in the tower and his miserable plight.

As he went on with Morty, he gave him a hint to say as little in Payton's presence as possible. "I know the man," he explained, "and where he 's weak. I 'm for seeing the back of him as soon as we can, but without noise."

"There 's always the bog," grumbled Morty.

"And the garrison at Tralee," Asgill rejoined drily, "to ask where he is! And his troopers to answer the question."

Morty bade him manage it his own way. "Only I 'll trouble you not to blame me," he added, "if the English soger finds the Colonel, and ruins us entirely."

"I 'll not," Asgill answered pithily, "if so be you 'll hold your tongue."

So at supper that night Payton looked in vain for the Kerry beauty whose charms the warmer wits of the mess had more than once painted in hues rather florid than fit. Nevertheless he would have enjoyed himself tolerably — nor the less because now and again he let his contempt for the company peep from under his complaisance — but for the obtuseness of his friend; who, as if he had only one man and one idea in his head, let fall with every moment some mention of Colonel John. Now, it was the happy certainty of the Colonel's return next day that inspired his eloquence; now, the pleasure with which the Colonel would meet Payton again; now, the lucky chance that found a pair of new foils on the window ledge.

"For he 's ruined entirely and no one to play with him!" Asgill continued, a twinkle in his eye. "No one, I 'm meaning, Major, of his sort of force at all! Begad, boys, you 'll see some fine fencing for once! Ye 'll think ye 've never seen any before I 'm doubting!"

"I 'm not sure that I can remain to-morrow," Payton said in a surly tone. He began to suspect that Asgill was quizzing him. He noticed that every time the justice named Colonel Sullivan, men looked furtively at one another, or straight before them, as if they were in a design. If that were so, the design could only be to pit Colonel

Sullivan against him, or to provoke a quarrel between them. He felt a qualm of apprehension, and he was confirmed in the plan he had already formed — to be gone next day. But in the meantime his temper moved him to carry the war into the enemy's country.

"I did n't know," he snarled, taking Asgill up in the middle of a eulogy of Colonel John's skill, "that he was so great a favourite of yours."

"He was not," Asgill replied, drily.

"He is now, it seems!" in the same sneering tone.

"We know him better. Don't we boys?"

They murmured assent.

"And the lady whose horse I sheltered for you," the Major continued, spitefully watching for an opening — "confound you, little you thanked me for it! — she must be still more in his interest than you? And how does that suit your book?"

Asgill had great self-control, and the Major was not a close observer. But the thrust was so unexpected that on the instant Payton read the other secret in his eyes — knew that he loved, and knew that he was jealous. Jealous of Sullivan! Jealous of the man whom he was for some reason praising. Then why not jealous of a younger, a more fashionable rival? Asgill's cunningly reared plans began to sink, and even while he answered he knew it.

"She likes him," he said, "as we all do."

"Some more, some less," Payton answered with a grin.

"Just so," the Irishman returned, controlling himself. "Some more, some less. And why not, I 'm asking."

"I think I must stay over to-morrow," Payton remarked, smiling at the ceiling. "There must be a good deal to be seen here."

"Ah, there is," Asgill answered in apparent good humour.

"Worth seeing, too, I 'll be sworn!" the Englishman replied, smiling more broadly.

"And that 's true, too!" the other rejoined.

He had himself in hand; and it was not from him that the proposal to break up the party came. The Major it was who at last pleaded fatigue. Englishmen's heads, he said, were stronger than their stomachs; they were a match for port, but not for claret.

"You should correct it, Major, with a little cognac," The McMurrough suggested politely.

"Not to-night; and, by your leave, I 'll have my man called and go to bed."

"It's early," James McMurrough said, playing the host.

"It is, but I 'll have my man and go to bed," Payton answered, with true British obstinacy. "No offence to any gentleman."

"There 's none will take it here," Asgill answered. "An Irishman's house is his guest's castle." But, knowing that Payton liked his glass, he wondered; until it occurred to him that the other wished to have his hand steady for the sword-play next day.

The McMurrough, who had risen, took a light and attended his guest to his room. Asgill and the O'Beirnes remained seated at the table, the young men scoffing at the Englishman's conceit of himself, Asgill silent and downcast. His scheme for ridding himself of Payton had failed; it remained to face the situation. He did not distrust Flavia, but he distrusted Payton — his insolence, his violence, and the privileged position which his duellist's skill gave him. And then there was Colonel John. If Payton learned what was afoot at the tower, and saw his way to make use of it, the worst might happen to all concerned.

He looked up at a touch from Morty, and to his astonishment he saw Flavia standing at the end of the table. There was a hasty scrambling to the feet, for the men had not drunk deep, and by all in the house — except her brother — the girl was treated with respect.

"I was thinking," Asgill said, foreseeing trouble, "that you were in bed and asleep." Her hair was tied back negligently and her dress half-fastened at the throat.

"I cannot sleep," she answered. And then she stood a moment drumming with her slender fingers on the table, and the men noticed that she was unusually pale. "I cannot sleep," she repeated, a tremor in her voice. "I keep thinking of him. I want some one — to go to him."

"Now?"

"Now!"

"But," Asgill said slowly, "I 'm thinking that to do that were to give him hopes. It were to spoil all. Once in twenty-four hours — that was agreed. And it is not four hours since you were there. If there is one thing needful, not the least doubt of it! — it is to leave him thinking that we 're meaning it."

He spoke reasonably. But the girl laboured under a weight of agitation that did not suffer her to reason. "But if he dies?" she cried in a woeful tone. "If he dies of hunger? Oh, my God, of hunger! What have we done then? I tell you," she continued, "I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!" She looked from one to the other as appealing to each in turn to share her horror, and to act. It is wicked, it is wicked!" she continued, in a shriller tone and with a note of defiance in her voice, "and who will answer for it if he dies? I, not you! I, who tricked him, who lied to him, who lured him there!"

For a moment there was a stricken silence in the room. Then, "And what had he done to you?" Asgill retorted with spirit — for he saw that if he did not meet her on her own plane she was capable of any act, however ruinous. "Or, if not to you, to Ireland, to your King, to your country, to your hopes?" He flung into his voice all the indignation of which he was master. "A trick, you say? Was it not by a trick he ruined all? The fairest prospect, the brightest day that ever dawned for Ireland! The day of freedom, of liberty, of ——"

She twisted her fingers feverishly together.

"Yes," she said, "yes! Yes, but — I can't bear it! It is no use talking," she continued, with a violent shudder. "You are here—look!" she pointed to the table strewn with the remains of the meal. "But he is — starving! Starving!" she repeated, as if the physical pain touched herself.

"You shall go to him to-morrow! Go, yourself!" he replied in a soothing tone.

"I!" she cried. "Never!"

"Oh, but ——" Asgill began, perplexed but not surprised by her attitude. "But there 's your brother," he continued, relieved. "He will tell you, I 'm sure, that nothing can be so harmful as to change now. Your sister," he went on, addressing The McMurrough, who had just descended the stairs, "she 's wishing some one will go to the Colonel, and see if he 's down a peg. But I 'm telling her ——"

"It 's folly entirely, you should be telling her!" James McMurrough replied, curtly and roughly. "To-morrow at sunset, and not an hour earlier, he 'll be visited. And then it 'll be you, Flavvy, that 'll speak to him! What more is it you 're wanting?"

"I speak to him?" she cried. "I could n't!"

"But it 'll be you 'll have to!" he replied roughly. "Was n't it so arranged?"

"I could n't," she replied, in the same tone of trouble. "Some one else — if you like!"

"But it 's not some one else will do," James retorted.

"But why should I be the one — to go?" she wailed. She had Colonel John's face before her, haggard, sunken, famished, as, peering into the gloomy, firelit room, she had seen it that afternoon.

"For a very good reason," her brother retorted with a sneer. He looked at Asgill and laughed.

That look startled her as a flash of light startles a traveller groping through darkness. "Why?" she repeated in a different tone.

But neither her tone nor Asgill's glance put James McMurrough on his guard; he was in one of his brutal humours. "Why?" he replied. "Because he 's a silly fool, as I 'm thinking some others are, and has a fancy for you, Flavvy! Faith, you 're not blind!" he continued, "and know it, I 'll be sworn, as well as I do! Any way, I 've a notion that if you let him see that there is no one in the house wishes him worse than you, or would see him starve with a lighter heart — I 'm thinking it will be for bringing him down, if anything will!"

She did not answer. Outwardly she was not much moved; but inwardly, the horror of herself which she had felt as she lay upstairs in the darkness, thinking of the starving man, choked her. They were using her because the man — loved her! Because hard words, cruel treatment, brutality from her would be ten times more hard, more cruel, more brutal than from others! Because such treatment at her hands would be more likely to break his spirit and crush his heart! To what viler use, to what lower end, could a woman be used or human feeling be prostituted?

Nor was this all. On the tide of this loathing of herself rose another, a stranger feeling. The man loved her. She did not doubt the statement Its truth came home to her at once. And because it placed him in a light in which she had never viewed him before, because it recalled a hundred things, acts, words on his part which she had barely noted at the time, it showed him, too, as one whom she had never seen. Had he been free, prosperous, triumphant, the knowledge that he loved her, that he, her enemy, loved her, might have revolted her — she might have hated him the more for it. But now that he lay a prisoner, famished, starving, the fact that he loved her touched her heart, transfixed her with an almost poignant feeling, choked her with a rising flood of pity and self-reproach.

"So there you have it, Flavvy!" James cried, complacently. "And sure, you 'll not be making a fool of yourself at this time of day!"

She stood looking at him with strange eyes, thinking, not answering. Asgill only saw a burning blush dye for an instant the whiteness of her face. He discovered, with the subtle insight of one who loved, a part of what she was thinking. He wished James McMurrough in the depth of perdition. But it was too late, or he feared so.

Great was his relief, therefore, when she spoke. "Then you 'll not — be going now?" she said.

"Now?" James retorted contemptuously. "Have n't I told you, you 'll go to-morrow?"

"If I must," she said, slowly, "I will — if I must."

"Then what 's the good of talking," The McMurrough answered. He was proceeding to say more when the opportunity was taken from him. One of the O'Beirnes, who happened to avert his eyes from the girl, discovered Payton standing at the foot of the stairs. Phelim's exclamation apprised the others that something was amiss, and they turned.

"I left my snuff-box on the table," Payton said, with a sly grin. How much he had heard they could not tell. "Ha! there it is! Thank you. Sorry, I am sure! Hope I don't trespass. Will you present me to your sister, Mr. McMurrough?"

James McMurrough had no option but to do so — looking foolish. Luke Asgill stood by with rage in his heart, cursing the evil chance which had brought Flavia downstairs.

"I assure you," Payton said, bowing low before her, but not so low that the insolence of his smile was hidden from all, "I think myself happy. My friend Asgill's picture of you, warmly as he painted it, fell infinitely below the reality!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE KEY

COLONEL JOHN rose and walked unsteadily to the window. He rested a hand on either jamb and looked through it, peering to right and left with wistful eyes. He detected no one, nothing, no change, no movement, and, with a groan, he straightened himself. But he still continued to look out, gazing at the pitiless blue sky in which the sun was still high.

Presently he grew weary, and went back to his chair. He sat down with his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands. Again his ears had deceived him! How many more times would he start to his feet, fancying he heard the footstep that did not fall, calling aloud to those who were not there, anticipating those who, more heedless than the face of nature without, would not come before the appointed time! And that was hours away, hours of thirst and hunger, almost intolerable; of patience and waiting, broken only by such a fancy, born of his weakened senses, as had just drawn him to the window.

Colonel John was a man sane and well-balanced; but even he had succumbed more than once during the last twelve hours to gusts of rage, provoked as much by the futility of his suffering as by the cruelty of his persecutors. After each of these storms he had scolded himself and grown calm. But they had made their mark upon him, they had left his eyes wilder, his cheeks more hollow, his hand less firm.

Notwithstanding, he was not light-headed. He could command his faculties, he could still reflect and plan. But at times he found himself confounding the present with the past, fancying, for a while, that he was in a Turkish prison, or starting from a waking dream of some cold camp in Russian snows — alas! starting from it only to shiver with that penetrating, heart-piercing, frightful cold, which was worse to bear than the gnawing of hunger or the longing of thirst. He had burned, in fighting the cold of the past night, all that would burn, except the chair on which he sat.

He had not eaten for more than seventy hours. But the long privation, which had weakened his limbs and blanched his cheeks, had not availed to shake his will. The possibility of surrender did not occur to him, partly because he felt sure that James McMurrough would not be so foolish as to let him die; but partly, also, by reason of a noble stubbornness in the man, that for no pain of death would leave a woman or a child to perish. More than once Colonel Sullivan had had to make that choice, amid the horrors of a retreat across famished lands, with wolves and Cossacks on his skirts; and perhaps the choice then made had become a habit of the mind. At any rate, he gave no thought to yielding.

He had sat for some minutes in the attitude described, when once more a sound startled him. He raised his head and turned his eyes on the window. Then he faltered to his feet, and once again went unsteadily to the window and looked out.

At the same moment Flavia looked in. Their eyes met. Their faces were less than a yard apart.

The girl started back with a cry, caused by horror at the change in his aspect. For she had left him hungry, she found him starving; she had left him haggard, she found him with eyes unnaturally large, his temples hollow, his lips dry, his chin unshaven. It was indeed a staring mask of famine that looked out of the dusky room at her, and looked not the less pitifully, not the less wofully, because, as soon as its owner took in her identity, the mask tried to smile.

"Mother of God!" she whispered. Her face had grown nearly as white as his. She had imagined nothing like this.

Colonel John, believing that he read pity as well as horror in her face, felt a sob rise in his breast. He tried to smile the more bravely for that, and presently he found a queer, husky voice.

"You must not leave me — too long," he said.

She drew in her breath, and averted her face, to hide, he hoped, the effect of the sight upon her. Or perhaps — for he saw her shudder — she was mutely calling the sunlit lake on which her eyes rested, the blue sky, to witness against this foul cruelty.

But it seemed that he deceived himself. For when she turned her face to him again, though it was still colourless, it was hard and set.

"You must sign," she said. "You must sign the paper."

His parched lips opened, but he did not answer.

"You must sign!" she repeated insistently. "You must sign!"

Still he did not answer; he only looked at her with eyes of infinite reproach. She, a woman, a girl, whose tender heart should have bled for him, could see him tortured, could aid in the work, and cry "Sign!"

She could indeed, for she repeated the word — feverishly. "Sign!" she cried. And then, "If you will," she said, "I will give you — see! You shall have this. You shall eat and drink; only sign! For God's sake sign what they want, and eat and drink!"

With fingers that trembled with haste she drew from a hiding-place in her cloak bread and milk and wine. "See what I have brought," she continued, holding them before his starting eyes, his cracking lips, "if you will sign."

He gazed at them, at her, with anguish of the mind as well as of the body. How he had mistaken her! How he had misread her! Then, with a groan, "God forgive you!" he cried, "I cannot! I cannot!"

"You will not sign?" she retorted.

"Cannot, and will not!" he said.

"And why? Why will you not?"

On that his patience gave way; and, swept along by one of those gusts of rage, he spoke. "Why?" he cried in hoarse accents. "Because, ungrateful, unwomanly, miserable as you are — I will not rob you or the dead! Because I will not be false to an old man's trust! Because," — he laughed a half-delirious laugh — "there is nothing to sign. I have burned your parchments these two days, and if you make me suffer twice as much as I have suffered you can do nothing!" He held out hands which trembled with passion. "You can do nothing!" he repeated. "Neither you, who — God forgive you, have no woman's heart, no woman's pity! nor he who would have killed me in the bog to gain that which he now starves me to get! But I foiled him then, as I will foil him to-day, ingrate, perjured, accursed ——"

He faltered, steadying himself against the wall. For a moment he covered his eyes with the other hand. Then "God forgive me!" he resumed in a lower tone, "I know not what I say! And you — Go! for you know not what you do. You do not know what it is to hunger and thirst, or you would not try me thus! Yet I ought to remember that — that it is not for yourself you do it!"

He turned his back on her and on the window. He had taken three steps when she cried, "Wait!"

"Go!" he repeated with a backward gesture of the hand. "Go!"

"Wait!" she cried. "And take them! Oh! take them! Quick!" He turned about. She was holding the food and the drink through the window, holding them out for him to take. But it might be another deception. He was not sure, and he took a step in a stealthy fashion toward the window, as if, were she off her guard, he would snatch them from her. But she cried again, "Take them! Take them!" with tears in her voice. "I brought them for you."

The craving was so strong upon him that he took them then without answering her or thanking her. He turned his back on her, as if he dared not let her see the desire in his face; and standing thus, he drew the stopper from the bottle of milk, and drank. He would fain have held the bottle to his lips until he had drained the last drop, but he controlled himself, and when he had swallowed a few mouthfuls, he removed it. Then he broke off three or four small fragments of the bread, and ate them one by one and slowly — the first with difficulty, the second more easily, the third with an avidity which he checked only by a firm effort of the will. "Presently!" he told himself. "There is plenty, there is plenty." Yet he allowed himself two more mouthfuls of bread and another sip of milk — milk that was nectar, rather than any earthly drink.

At length, with new life running in his veins, and a pure thankfulness that she had proved herself very woman at the last, he laid his treasures on the chair, and turned to her. She was gone.

While he had eaten and drunk he had felt her presence at his back, and once he was sure that he had heard her sob. But she was gone. He staggered — for he was not yet steady on his feet — to the window, and looked to right and left.

She had not gone far She was lying prone on the sward, her face hidden on her arms; and it was true that he had heard her sob, for she was weeping without restraint. The change in him, to say nothing of his reproaches, had done something more than shock her. The scales of prejudice which had dimmed her sight fell from her eyes; and, for the first time, she saw him as he was. For the first time she perceived that, in pursuing the path he had followed, he might have thought himself right. Parts of the passionate rebuke which suffering and indignation had forced from him remained branded upon her memory; and she wept in shame, feeling her helplessness, her ignorance, feeling that she had no longer any sure support or prop. How could she trust those who, taking advantage at once of her wounded vanity and her affection for her brother, had drawn her into this hideous, this cruel, business?

The sense of her loneliness, the knowledge that those about her used her for their own ends — and those the most unworthy — overwhelmed her.

When the first passion of self-reproach had spent itself, she heard him calling her by name, and in a voice that stirred her heart-strings. She rose, first to her knees and then to her feet, and, averting her face, "I will open the door," she said, humbly and in a broken voice. "I have brought the key."

He did not answer, and she did not unlock. For as, still keeping her face averted that he might not see her tears, she turned the corner of the tower to gain the door, her brother's head and shoulders rose above the level of the platform. As The McMurrough stepped on to the latter from the path, he was in time to see her skirt vanishing. He saw no more. But his suspicions were aroused. He strode across the face of the tower, turned the corner and came on her in the act of putting the key in the lock.

"What are you doing?" he cried. in a terrible voice. "Are you mad?"

She did not answer, but neither did he pause for her answer. The imminence of the peril, the thought that the man whom he had so deeply wronged might in another minute be free to avenge himself and punish his foes, rose up before him, and he thrust her roughly from the door. The key, not yet turned, came away in her hand, and he tried to snatch it from her.

"Give it me!" he cried. "Do you hear? Give it me!"

"I will not!" she cried. "No!"

"Give it up, I say!" he retorted. And this time he made good his hold on her wrist. He tried to force the key from her. "Let it go!" he panted, "or I shall hurt you!"

But he made a great mistake if he thought that he could coerce Flavia in that way. Her fingers only closed more tightly on the key. "Never!" she cried, struggling with him. "Never! I am going to let him out!"

"You coward!" a voice cried through the door. "Coward! Coward!" There was a sound of drumming on the door.

But Colonel John's voice and his blows were powerless to help, as James, in a frenzy of rage and alarm, gripped the girl's wrist and twisted it. "Let it go! Let it go, you fool!" he cried, brutally, "or I will break your arm!"

Her face turned white with pain, but for a moment she endured in silence. Then a shriek escaped her.

It was answered instantly. Neither he nor she had had eyes for aught but one another; and the hand that fell, and fell heavily, on James's shoulder was as unexpected as a thunderbolt.

"By Heaven, man," a voice cried in his ear. "Are you mad? Or is this the way you treat women in Kerry? Let the lady go! Let her go, I say!"

The command was needless, for at the first sound of the voice James had fallen back with a curse, and Flavia, grasping her bruised wrist with her other hand, reeled for support against the Tower wall. For a moment no one spoke. Then James, with scarcely a look at Payton — for he it was — bade her come away with him. "If you are not mad," he growled, "you 'll have a care! You 'll have a care, and come away, girl!"

"When I have let him out, I will," she answered, her eyes glowing sombrely as she nursed her wrist. In her, too, the old Adam had been raised.

"Give me the key!" he said for the last time.

"I will not," she said.

The McMurrough turned his rage upon the intruder. "Deuce take you, what business will it be of yours?" he cried. "Who are you to come between us, eh?"

Payton bowed. "If I offend," he said, airily, "I am entirely at your service." He tapped the hilt of his sword.

"You do not wear one, but I have no doubt you can use one. I shall be happy to give you satisfaction where and when you please. A time and place ——"

But James did not stop to hear him out. He turned with an oath and a snarl, and went off — went off in such a manner that Flavia could not but see that the challenge was not to his taste. At another time she would have blushed for him. But his brutal violence had done more during the last ten minutes to depose his image from her heart than years of neglect and rudeness.

Payton saw him go, and, blessing the good fortune which had put him in a position to command the beauty's thanks, he turned to receive them. But Flavia was not looking at him, was not thinking of him. She had put the key in the lock and was trying to turn it. Her left wrist, however, was too weak, and the right was so strained as to be useless. She signed to him to turn the key, and he did so, and threw open the door, wondering much what it was all about.

He did not at once recognize the man who, pale and haggard, a mere ghost of himself, dragged himself up the three steps, and, exhausted by the effort, leaned against the doorpost. But when Colonel John spoke and tried to thank the girl, he knew him.

He whistled. "You are Colonel Sullivan!" he said.

"The same, sir!" Colonel John murmured mechanically.

"Are you ill?"

"I am not well," the other replied, with a sickly smile. The indignation which he had felt during the contest between the girl and her brother had been too much for his strength. "I shall be better presently," he added. He closed his eyes.

"We should be getting him below," Flavia said in an undertone.

Payton looked from one to the other. He was in a fog. "Has he been here long?" he asked.

"Nearly four days," she replied, with a shiver.

"And nothing to eat?"

"Nothing."

"The deuce! And why?"

She did not stay to think how much it was wise to tell him. In her repentant mood she was anxious to pour herself out in self-reproach. "We wanted him to convey some property," she said, "as we wished."

"To your brother?"

"Ah, to him!" Then, seeing his astonishment, "It was mine," she added.

Payton began to understand. He looked at her; but no, he did not understand now. For if the idea had been to constrain Colonel Sullivan to transfer her property to her brother, how did her interest match with that? He could only suppose that her brother had coerced her, and that she had given him the slip and tried to release the man — with the result he had witnessed.

One thing was clear. The property, large or small, was still hers. The Major looked with a thoughtful face at the smiling valley, with its cabins scattered over the slopes, at the lake and the fishing-boats, and the rambling slate-roofed house with its sheds and peat-stacks. He wondered.

No more was said at that moment, however, for Flavia saw that Colonel Sullivan's strength was not to be revived in an hour. He must be assisted to the house and cared for there. In the meantime, and to lend some strength, she was anxious to give him such wine and food as he could safely take. To procure these she entered the room in which he had been confined.

As she cast her eyes round its dismal interior, marked the poor handful of embers that told of his long struggle with the cold, marked the one chair which he had saved — for to lie on the floor had been death — marked the beaten path that led from the chair to the window, and spoke of many an hour of painful waiting and of hope deferred, she saw the man in another, a more gentle aspect. She had seen the heroism, she now saw the pathos of his conduct, and tears came afresh to her eyes. "For me!" she murmured. "For me! And how had I treated him!"

Her old grievance against him was forgotten, wiped out of remembrance by his sufferings. She dwelt only on the treatment she had meted out to him.

When they had given him to eat and drink he assured them, smiling, that he could walk. But when he attempted to do so he staggered. "He will need a stronger arm than yours," Payton said, with a grin. "May I offer mine?"

For the first time she looked at him gratefully. "Thank you," she said.

"I can walk," the Colonel repeated obstinately. "A little giddy, that is all." But in the end he needed all the help that both could give him. And so it happened that a few minutes later Luke Asgill, standing at the entrance to the courtyard, looked along the road, and saw the three approaching, linked in apparent amity.

The shock was great, for James McMurrough had fled, cursing, into solitude and the hills, taking no steps to warn his ally. The sight struck Asgill with the force of a bullet. Colonel John released, and in the company of Flavia and Payton! All his craft, all his coolness, forsook him. He slunk out of sight by a back way, but not before Payton had marked his retreat.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SCENE IN THE PASSAGE

UNDER the shadow of the great peat-stack, whither he had retired that he might make up his mind before he faced the three, Asgill cursed The McMurrough with all his heart. It was, it must be, through his folly and mismanagement that the thing had befallen, that the prisoner had been released, that Payton had been let into the secret.

How was he to get rid of Payton? How prevent Colonel John from resuming that sway in the house which he had exercised before? How nip in the bud that nascent sympathy, that feeling for him, which Flavia's outbreak the night before had suggested? Or how, short of all this, was he to face either Payton or the Colonel?

In counsel with James McMurrough he might have arranged a plan of action; at least, he would have learned from him what Payton knew. But James's absence ruined all. In the end, after waiting some time in the vain hope that he would appear, Asgill went in to supper.

Colonel Sullivan was not there; he was in no condition to descend. Nor was Flavia; whereon Asgill reflected, with chagrin, that probably she was attending upon the invalid. Payton was at table, with the two O'Beirnes, and three other buckeens. The Englishman, amused by the discovery he had made, was openly disdainful of his companions; while the Irishmen, sullen and suspicious, were not aware how much he knew. If The McMurrough chose to imprison his unpopular kinsman, it was nothing to them; nor a matter into which gentlemen eating at his table and drinking his potheen and claret were called upon to peer too closely.

But for his repute as a duellist they would have picked a quarrel with the visitor there and then. And but for the presence of his four troopers in the background they might have fallen upon him in some less regular fashion. As it was, they sat eyeing him askance; and, without shame, were relieved when Asgill entered. They looked to him to clear up the situation and put the interloper in his right place.

"I 'm fearing I 'm late," Asgill said. "Where 'll The McMurrough be, I wonder?"

"Gone to meet your friend, I should think," Payton replied with a sneer.

Asgill maintained a steady face. "My friend?" he repeated. "Oh, Colonel Sullivan?"

"Yes, your friend who was to return to-day," the other retorted. "Have you seen anything of him?" he continued, with a grin.

Asgill fixed his eyes steadily on Payton's face. "I 'm fancying you have the advantage of me," he said. "More by token, I 'm thinking, Major, you have seen that same friend already."

"Maybe I have."

"And had a bout with him?"

"Eh?"

"And, faith, had the best of the bout, too!" Asgill continued coolly, and with his eyes fixed on the other's features as if his one aim was to see if he had hit the mark. "So much the best that I 'll be chancing a guess he 's upstairs at this moment, and wounded! Leastwise, I hear you and the young lady brought him to the house between you, and him scarcely able to use his ten toes."

Payton, with his mouth open, glared at the speaker in a manner that at another time must have provoked him to laughter.

"Is n't that the fact?" Asgill asked, coldly.

"The fact!" the other burst forth. "No, I 'm cursed if it is! And you know it is not! You know as well as I do ——" And with that he poured forth a version of the events of the afternoon.

When he had done, "That 's a strange story," Asgill said quietly, "if it 's true."

"True?" Payton rejoined, laying his hand on a glass and speaking in a towering rage. "You know it 's true!"

"I know nothing about it," Asgill replied, with the utmost coolness.

"Nothing?"

"And for a good reason. Sure, and I 'm the last person they would be likely to tell it to!"

"And you were not a party to it?" Payton cried.

"Why should I be?" Asgill rejoined. "What have I to gain by robbing the young lady of her inheritance? I 'd be more likely to lose by it than gain."

"Lose by it? Why?"

"That is my affair," Asgill answered. And he hummed:

> "'They tried put the comether on Judy McBain:
> One, two, three, one, two three!
> Cotter and crowder and Paddy O'Hea;
> For who but she 's owner of Ballymacshane?'"

He made his meaning so clear that Payton, scowling at him with his hand on a glass as if he meant to throw it, dropped his eyes and his hand and fell into a gloomy study. He could not but own the weight of the other's argument. If Asgill was a pretender to the heiress's hand the last thought in his mind would be to divest her of her property.

Asgill read his thoughts, and presently: "I hope the wound is not serious?" he said.

"He is not wounded," the Major answered curtly. Meanwhile the O'Beirnes and their fellows grinned their admiration of the bear-tamer; and went out one by one, until the two men were left together

They sat some way apart, Payton brooding savagely, with his eyes on the table, Asgill toying with the things before him. Each saw the prize clear before him; each saw the other in the way. Payton cared for the girl herself only as a toy that had caught his fancy; but his mouth watered for her possessions. Asgill cared little or nothing for the inheritance, but he swore that the other man should never live to possess the woman. "It is a pity," Payton meditated, "for, with his aid, I could take the girl, willing or unwilling. She 'd not be the first Irish girl who has gone to her marriage across the pommel!" While Asgill reflected that if he could find Payton alone on a dark night it would not be his small-sword would help him or his four troopers would find him! But it must not be at Morristown.

Each owned, with reluctance, that the other had advantages. Asgill was Irish, and known to Flavia; but Payton, though English, was the younger, the handsomer, the better born, and he flattered himself that, given a little time, he would win, if not by favour, by force or fraud. But, could he have looked into Asgill's heart, he would have trembled. He would have known that, while Irish bogs were deep and Irish pikes were sharp, his life would not be worth one week's purchase if he wronged this girl.

And Asgill suspected the other; and he shook with rage at the thought that Payton might offer the girl some rudeness. When Payton rose to go, he rose also; and when, by chance, Payton sat down, he sat down also. At once the Englishman understood; and thenceforth they sat with frowning faces, each more certain, with every moment, that, the other removed, his path to the goal was clear and open.

There was claret on the table, and the Major did not spare it. When he rose to his feet to retire he was heated and flushed, but not drunk. "Where 's that young cub?" he asked.

Asgill shrugged his shoulders. "I can't hope to fill his place," he said with a smooth smile. "But I will be doing the honours as well as I can."

"You are very officious, it seems to me," Payton growled. And then, more loudly, "I am going to bed," he said.

"In his absence," Asgill answered, with mock politeness, "I will have the honour of lighting you."

"You need n't trouble."

"Faith, and it 's no trouble at all," Asgill replied in the same tone. And, taking two of the candles from the table, he preceded the Englishman up the stairs.

The gradual ascent of the lights and the men's footsteps should have given Flavia warning of their coming. But either she disdained concealment or she was thinking of other things, for when they entered the passage beyond the landing they espied the girl standing outside the Colonel's door A pang shot through Asgill's heart, and he drew in his breath.

She raised her hand. "Ah," she said, "he has been crying out! But I think it was in his sleep. Will you be making as little noise as you can?"

Asgill did not answer, but Payton did. "Happy man!" he said. And, being in his cups, he said it in such a tone and with such a look that a deep blush crimsoned the girl's face.

Her eyes snapped. "Good-night," she said, coldly.

Asgill continued to keep silence, but Payton did not take the hint. "Wish I 'd such a guardian!" he said with a chuckle. "I 'd be a happy man then!"

Asgill's face was dark with passion, but "Good-night" Flavia repeated coldly. And this time the displeasure in her tone silenced the Major. The two men went on to their rooms, though Asgill's hands itched to be at the other's throat. A moment later two doors closed sharply.

Flavia remained in the darkness of the passage, but she no longer listened — she thought. Presently she went back to her room.

There she continued to stand and to think. And the blush which the Major's insinuation had brought to her cheek still burned there. It was natural that Payton's words should direct her thoughts to the man outside whose door he had found her; nor less natural that she should institute a comparison between the two, should consider how the one had treated her, when he had held her struggling in his arms, when in her despair she had beaten his face with her hands, and how the other had treated her in the few hours he had known her! Thus comparing she could not but find in the one a nobility, in the other a — a dreadfulness. Looking back, and having Payton's words and manner fresh in her mind, she had to own that, in all his treatment of her, Colonel Sullivan, while opposing and thwarting her, had still, and always, respected her.

Strange to say, she could not now understand that rage against him which had before carried her to such lengths. How had he wronged her? She could find no sufficing answer. A curtain had fallen between the past and the present. The rising? It stood on a sudden very distant, very dim, a thing of the past, an enterprise romantic, but hopeless. The contemptuous words in which he had denounced it rang again in her ears, but they no longer kindled her resentment; they convinced. As one recovering from sickness looks back on the delusions of fever, Flavia reviewed the hopes and aspirations of the past month. She saw now it was not with a handful of cotters and peasants that Ireland could be saved or the true faith restored!

She was still standing a pace within her door, when a foot stumbled heavily on the stairs. She recognized it for James's footstep — she had heard him stumble on those stairs before — and she laid her hand on the latch. She had never had a real quarrel with him until now and, outrageously as he had treated her, she could not bear to sleep without making an attempt to heal the breach. She opened the door, and stepped out.

James's light was travelling up the stairs, but he had not himself reached the landing. She had just noted this when a door opened, and Payton looked out. He saw her, and, still flushed with claret, he misunderstood her presence and her purpose. He stepped toward her

"Thought so!" he chuckled. "Still listening, eh? Why not listen at my door? Then it would be a pretty man and a pretty maid. But I 've caught you." He shot out his arm and tried to draw her toward him. "There 's no one to see, and the least you can do is to give me a kiss for a forfeit!"

The girl recoiled, outraged and angry. But, knowing her brother was at hand, and seeing in a flash what might happen in the event of a collision, she did so in silence, hoping to escape before he came upon them. Unfortunately Payton misread her silence and took her movement for a show of feigned modesty. With a movement as quick as hers, he grasped her roughly, dragged her toward him and kissed her.

She screamed then in sheer rage — screamed with such passion that Payton let her go and stepped back with an oath. As he did so he turned, and the turn brought him face to face with James McMurrough.

The young man, tipsy and smarting with his wrongs saw what was before his eyes — his sister in Payton's arms — but he saw something more. He saw the man who had thwarted him that day, and whom he had not at the time dared to beard. What he might have done had he been sober matters not. Drink and vindictiveness gave him more than the courage he needed, and, with a roar of anger, he dashed the glass he was carrying — and its contents — into Payton's face.

The Englishman dropped where he was, and James stood over him, swearing, while the grease guttered from the tilted candle in his right hand. Flavia gasped, and, horror-struck, clutched James's arm as he lifted the candlestick and made as if he would beat in the man's brains.

Fortunately a stronger hand than hers interfered. Asgill dragged the young man back. "Have n't you done enough?" he cried. "Would you murder the man, and his troopers in the house?"

"Ah, did n't you see, curse you, he ——"

"I know, I know!" Asgill answered hoarsely. "But not now! Not now! Let him rise if he can! Let him rise, I say! Payton!"

The moment James stood back the fallen man staggered to his feet, and though the blood was running down his face from a cut on the cheekbone, he showed that he was less hurt than startled. "You 'll give me satisfaction for this!" he muttered. "You 'll give me satisfaction for this," he repeated, between his teeth.

"Ah, by heaven, I will!" James McMurrough answered furiously. "And kill you, too!"

"At eight to-morrow! Do you hear? At eight to-to-morrow! Not an hour later!"

"I 'll not keep you waiting," James retorted.

Flavia leaned almost fainting against her door. She tried to speak, but her voice failed her.

And Payton's livid, scowling, bleeding face was hate itself. "Behind the yews in the garden?" he said, disregarding her presence.

"Ah, I 'll meet you there!" The McMurrough answered, pot-valiant. "And, more by token, order your coffin, for you 'll need it!" Drink and rage left no place in his brain for fear.

"That will be seen — to-morrow," the Englishman answered, in a tone that chilled the girl's marrow. Then, with his kerchief pressed to his cheek to stanch the blood, he retreated into his room, and slammed the door. They heard him turn the key in it.

Flavia found her voice. She looked at her brother. "Ah, heavens!" she cried. "Why did I open my door?"

James, still pot-valiant, returned her look. "Because you were a fool," he said. "But I 'll spit him, never fear! Faith, and I 'll spit him like a fowl!" In his turn he went on unsteadily to his room, disappeared within it, and closed the door.

Flavia and Asgill remained together. Her eyes met his. "Ah, why did I open my door?" she cried. "Why did I?"

He had no comfort for her. He shook his head, but did not speak.

"He will kill him!" she said.

Asgill reflected in a heavy silence. "I will think what can be done," he muttered at last. "Do you go to bed."

"To bed?" she cried.

"There is naught to be done to-night," he answered, in a low tone. "If the troopers were not with him — but that is useless. And — his door is locked. Do you go to bed, and I will think what we can do."

"To save James?" She laid her hand on Asgill's arm, and he quivered. "Ah, you will save him!" She had forgotten her brother's treatment of her earlier in the day.

"If I can," he said slowly. His face was damp and very pale. "If I can," he repeated. "But it will not be easy to save him honourably."

"What do you mean?" she whispered.

"He 'll save himself, I fancy. But his honour ——"

"Ah!" The word came from her in a cry of pain.

CHAPTER XXIII

BEHIND THE YEWS

THE passages were still gray and chill, when one of the bedchamber doors opened and a face peeped out. The face was Flavia's. Presently the girl stepped forward — paused, scared by a board that creaked under her naked foot — then went on again. She reached one of the doors, and scratched on it with her nail.

No one answered the summons, and she pushed the door open and went in. As she had feared, enlightened by Asgill's hint she found James was awake and sitting up in his bed, his arms clasped about his knees. His eyes met hers as she entered, and in his eyes, and in his form, huddled together as in sheer physical pain, she read beyond all doubt fear. Why she had felt certain, courageous herself, that this was what she would find she did not know. But there it was, as she had foreseen it, through the long, restless, torturing hours.

James tried to utter the oath that, deceiving her, might rid him of her presence. But his nerves, shaken by his overnight drink, could not command his voice even for that. His eyes dropped in shame; the muttered "What the plague will you be wanting at this hour?" was no more than a querulous whisper.

"I could n't sleep," she said, avoiding his eyes.

"I, no more," he muttered. "Curse him! Curse you, too! Why were you getting in his way? You 've as good as murdered me with your tricks and your poses!"

"Heaven forbid!" she exclaimed.

"Ah, you have!" he answered, rocking himself to and fro in his excitement. "If it were any one else, I 'm as ready to fight as another! But he 's killed four men, and he 'll kill me! Oh, if I 'd not come up at that minute! If I 'd not come up at that minute!"

The picture of what he would have escaped had he mounted the stairs a minute later was too much for him. Not a thought did he give to what might have happened to her had he come on the scene later; but, with all his cowardly soul laid bare, he rocked himself to and fro in a paroxysm of self-pity.

Yet he did not suffer more sorely under the lash of his own terrors than Flavia suffered — seeing him thus, the braggadocio stripped from him, and the poor, cringing creature displayed. If she had thought too much of her descent — and the more in proportion as fortune had straitened the line, and only in this corner of a downtrodden land was its greatness even a memory — she was chastened for it now! She could have wept tears of shame. And yet, so plain was the collapse of the man before her, that she did not think of reproach, even had she found heart to chide him, knowing that her words might send him to his death.

All her thought was, could she hide the blot? Could she, at any rate, so veil it that this insolent Englishman, this bully of the conquering race, might not perceive it? That were worth so much that her own life seemed a small price to pay for it.

But, alas! she could not purchase it with her life. Only in fairy tales can the woman pass for the man, and Doris receive in her tender bosom the thrust intended for the sterner breast. Then how could they shun at least open disgrace — open dishonour? For it needed but a glance at her brother's pallid face to assure her that, brought to the field, he would prove unequal even to the task of cloaking his fears.

She sickened at the thought, and her eyes grew hard. Was this the man in whom she had believed? And when he turned on his side and hid his face in the pillow and groaned she had small pity to spare for him. "Are you not well?" she asked.

"Can't you be seeing?" he answered fractiously; but for very shame he could not face her eyes. "Cannot you be seeing I am not fit to get up? See how my hand shakes!"

"What is to be done, then?"

He cursed Payton thrice in a frenzy of rage. He beat the pillow with his fist.

"That does no good," she said.

"I believe you want to kill me!" he complained with childish passicn. "I believe you want to see me dead! Why can't you be managing your own affairs, without — without — heavens!" And then, in a dreadful voice, "I shall be dead to-night! And you care nothing!"

He hid unmanly tears on his pillow, while she looked at the wall, pale to the lips. Her worst misgivings had not pictured a thing so mean as this, a spirit so poor. And this was her brother, her idol, he to whom she had fondly looked to revive the glories of the race! Truly she had been blind.

She had spoken to Luke Asgill the night before, and he would help her, she believed. But for that she would have turned, as her thoughts did turn, to Colonel John. But he lay prostrate, and the O'Beirnes were out of the question; she could not tell them. Youth has no pity, makes no allowance, expects the utmost, and a hundred times they had heard James brag and brawl. And Uncle Ulick was away.

There remained only Luke Asgill.

"If you are not well," she said, in the same hard voice, "shall I be telling Mr. Asgill? He may contrive something."

The man sweating in the bed leaped at the hope, as he would have leaped at any hope. Nor was he so upset by fear as not to reflect that, whatever Flavia asked Asgill would do. "Ah, tell him," he cried, raising himself on his elbow. "Do you be telling him! He can make him — wait, may be."

At that moment she came near to hating her brother. "I will send him to you," she said.

"No!" he cried anxiously. "No! Do you be telling him! Do you hear? I 'm not so well to see him."

She shivered, seeing plainly the unmixed selfishness of he course he urged. But she had not the heart to answer him. She went from the room and, going back to her own chamber, she dressed. By this time the house was astir, the June sunshine was pouring with the songs of birds through the windows. She heard one of the O'Beirnes stumble downstairs. Next Asgill opened his door and passed down. In a twinkling she followed him, making a sign to him to go on, and led him into the open air. Nor when they were outside did she speak until she had put the courtyard between herself and the house.

For she would have hidden their shame from all if she could! Even to say what she had to say cost her in humiliation more than her brother had paid for aught in his selfish life. But it had to be said, and, after a pause, and with eyes averted, "My brother is ill," she faltered. "He cannot meet — that man, this morning. It is — as you feared. And — what can we do?"

In another case Luke Asgill would have blessed the chance that linked him with her, cast her on his help. He had guessed, before she opened her mouth, what she had to say — nay, for hours he had lain sleepless on his bed, anticipating it. He had been certain of the issue — he knew James McMurrough; and, being a man who loved Flavia indeed, but loved life also, he had foreseen, with the cold sweat on his brow, what he would be driven to do.

He made no haste to answer, therefore, and his tone, when he did answer, was dull and lifeless. "Is it ill he is?" he asked. "It's a bad morning to be ill, and a meeting on hand."

She did not answer.

"Is he too bad to stand?" he continued. He made no attempt to hide his comprehension or his scorn.

"I don't say that," she faltered.

"Perhaps he told you," Asgill said — and there was nothing of the lover in his tone — "to speak to me?"

She nodded.

"It is I am to — put it off, I suppose?"

"If it be possible," she cried. "Oh, if it be possible! Is it?"

He stood, thinking, with a gloomy face. From the first he had seen that there were two ways only of extricating The McMurrough. The one by a mild explanation, which would leave his honour in the mud. The other by an explanation after a different fashion, with the word "liar" ready to answer to the word "coward." But he who gave this last explanation must be willing to back the word with the deed, and stop cavilling with the sword-point.

Now, Asgill knew the Major's skill with the sword; none better. And under other circumstances the justice — cold, selfish, scheming — would have gone many a mile about before he entered upon a quarrel with him. None the less, love had drawn him to contemplate this very thing. For surely, if he did this and lived, Flavia would smile on him. Surely, if he saved her brother's honour, she would be won. It was a forlorn, it was a desperate expedient. For no other advantage would Luke Asgill have faced the Major's sword-point. But, whatever he was, he loved. He loved! And for the face and the form beside him, and for the quality of soul that shone from the girl's eyes, and made her what she was, and to him different from all other women, he had made up his mind to run the risk.

It went for something that he believed that Flavia, if he failed her, would go to Colonel Sullivan. If she did that, Asgill was sure that his own chance was at an end. This was his chance. It lay with him now, to-day, at this moment — to dare or to retire, to win her favour at the risk of his life, or to yield her to another. In the chill morning hour he had discovered that he must risk all or lose all: and he had decided.

"I will make it possible," he said, slowly, questioning in his mind whether he dared make terms with her. "I will make it possible," he repeated, still more slowly, and with his eyes fixed on her face.

"If you could!" she cried, clasping her hands.

"I will!" he said, a sullen undertone in his voice. His eyes still dwelt darkly on her. "If he raises an objection, I will fight him — myself!"

She shrank from him. "Ah, but I can't ask that!" she cried, trembling.

"It is that or nothing."

"That or ——"

"There is no other way," he said. He spoke with the same ungraciousness; for, try as he would, and though the habit and the education of a life cried to him to treat with her and make conditions, he could not; and he was enraged that he could not.

The more as her wet eyes, her quick, mounting colour, told of her gratitude. In another moment she might have said a word fit to unlock his lips. And he would have spoken; and she would have pledged herself. But fate, in the person of old Darby, intervened. Timely or untimely, the butler appeared in the distant dorway, cried "Hist!" and, by a backward gesture, warned them of some approaching peril.

"I fear ——" she began.

"Yes, go!" Asgill replied, almost roughly. "He is coming, and he must not find us together."

The garden gate had barely closed on her skirts before Payton issued from the courtyard. The Englishman paused an instant in the gateway, his sword under his arm and a handkerchief in his hand. Thence he looked up and down the road with an air of confidence that provoked Asgill beyond measure. The sun did not seem bright enough for him, nor the air scented to his liking. Finally he approached the Irishman, who, affecting to be engaged with his own thoughts, had kept his distance.

"Is he ready?" he asked, with a sneer.

With an effort Asgill controlled himself. "He is not," he said.

"At his prayers, is he? Well, he 'll need them."

"He is not, to my knowledge," Asgill replied. "But he is ill."

Payton's face lightened with a joy not pleasant to see. "A coward!" he said, coolly. "I am not surprised! Ill, is he? Ay, I know that illness. It 's not the first time I 've met it."

Asgill had no wish to precipitate a quarrel. Only in the last resort had he determined to fling off the mask. But at that word "coward," though he knew it to be well deserved, his temper, sapped by the knowledge that love was forcing him into a position which reason repudiated, gave way, and he spoke his true thoughts.

"What a bully you are, Payton!" he said, in his slowest tone. "Sure, and you insult the man's sister in your drink ——"

"What 's that to you?"

"You insult the man's sister," Asgill persisted coolly, "and because he treats you like the tipsy creature you are, you 'd kill him like a dog."

Payton turned white. "And you, too," he said, "if you say another word! What in heaven's name is amiss with you, man, this morning? Are you mad?"

"I 'll not hear the word 'coward' used of the family — I 'll soon be one of!" Asgill returned, speaking on the spur of the moment, and wondering at himself the moment he had made the statement. "That 's what I 'm meaning! Do you see? And if you are for repeating the word, more by token, it 'll be all the breakfast you 'll have, for I 'll cram it down your ugly throat!"

Payton stared, divided between rage and astonishment. But the former was not slow to get the upper hand, and

"Enough said," he replied. "If you are willing to make it good, you 'll be coming this way."

"Willingly!" Asgill answered.

"I 'll have one of my men for witness. Ay, that I will! I don't trust you, Mr. Asgill, and that 's flat. Get you whom you please! In five minutes, in the garden, then?"

Asgill nodded. The Englishman looked once more at him to make sure that he was sober; then he turned on his heel and went back through the courtyard. Asgill remained alone.

He had taken the step there was no retracing. He had cast the dice, and the next few minutes would decide whether it was for life or death. The sunshine lost its warmth and grew pale, the hills lost their colour and their beauty, as he reflected that he might never see the one or the other again, might never return by that lake-side road by which he had come; as he remembered that all his plans for his aggrandizement, and they were many and clever, might end this day, this morning, this hour! It might well be, for the odds were great against him, that it was to this day that all his life had led up; that life by which men would by and by judge him, recalling this chicane and that extortion, thanking God that he was dead, or perhaps one here and there shrugging his shoulders in good-natured regret.

"Faith, Mr. Asgill," cried a voice in his ear, "it 's if you 're ill, the Major 's asking. And, by the power, it 's not very well you 're looking this day!"

Asgill eyed the interrupter — it was Morty O'Beirne —

with a sternness which his pallor made more striking. "I am coming," he said, "I am going to fight him."

"The deuce you are!" the young man answered. "Now, are you meaning? This morning that ever is?"

"Ay, now. Where is ——"

He stopped on the word, and was silent. Instead, he looked across the courtyard in the direction of the house. If he might see her again. If he might speak to her. But, no, Yet — was it certain that she knew — that she understood? And if she understood, would she know that he had gone to the meeting well-nigh without hope, aware how large, how very large, were the odds against him?

"But, faith, and it 's no jest fighting him, if the least bit in life of what I 've heard be true!" Morty said, a cloud on his face. He looked uncertainly from Asgill to the house and back. "Is it to be doing anything you want me?"

"I want you to come with me and see it out," Asgill said. He wheeled brusquely to the garden gate, but when he was within a pace of it he paused and turned his head. "Mr. O'Beirne," he said, "I 'm going in by this gate, and it 's not much to be expected I 'll come out any way but feet first. Will you be telling her, if you please, that I knew that same?"

"I will," Morty answered, genuinely distressed. "But I 'm asking is there no other way?"

"There is none," Asgill said. And he opened the gate.

Payton was waiting for him on the path under the yew trees, with two of his troopers on guard in the background.

He had removed his coat and vest, and stood, a not ungraceful figure, in the sunshine, bending his rapier and feeling its point with his thumb. He was doing this when his eyes surprised his opponent's entrance, and, without desisting from his employment, he smiled.

If the other's courage had begun to wane that smile would have restored it. For it roused in him a stronger passion than fear — the passion of hatred. He saw in the man before him, the man with the cruel smile, a demon who, in pure malice, without reason and without cause, would take his life, would rob him of joy and love and sunshine, and hurl him into the blackness of the gulf. And he was seized with a rage at once fierce and deliberate. This man, who would kill him and whom he saw smiling before him, he would kill! He thirsted to set his foot upon his throat and squeeze, and squeeze the life out of him! These were the thoughts that passed through his mind as he paused to throw off the encumbering coat. Then he advanced, drawing his weapon as he moved, and fixing his eyes on Payton; who, for his part, reading the other's thoughts in his face — for more than once he had seen that look — put himself on his guard without a word.

Asgill had no more than the rudimentary knowledge of the sword which was possessed in that day by all who wore it. He knew that, given time and the decent observances of the fencing-school, he would be a mere child in Payton's hands; that it would matter nothing whether the sun were on this side or that, or his sword the longer or the shorter by an inch.

The moment he was within reach, therefore, and his blade touched the other's, he rushed in, lunging fiercely at his opponent's breast and trusting to the vigour of his attack and the circular sweep of his point to protect himself. Not seldom has a man skilled in the subtleties of the art found himself confused and overcome by this mode of attack.

But Payton had met his man too often on the green to be taken by surprise. He parried the first thrust, the second he evaded by stepping adroitly aside. By the same movement he put the sun in Asgill's eyes.

Again the latter rushed in, striving to get within his opponent's guard; and again Payton stepped aside, and allowed the random thrust to pass wasted under his arm. Once more the same thing happened — Asgill rushed in, Payton parried or evaded with the ease and coolness of long-tried skill. By this time Asgill, forced to keep his blade in motion, was beginning to breathe quickly. The sweat stood on his brow, he struck more and more wildly, and with less and less strength or aim. He was aware — it could be read in the glare of his eyes — that he was being reduced to the defensive; and he knew that to be fatal.

An oath broke from his panting lips and he rushed in again, even more recklessly, more at random, than before, his sole object now to kill the other, to stab him at close quarters, no matter what happened to himself.

Again Payton avoided the full force of the rush, but this time after a different fashion. He retreated a step. Then with a flicker and a girding of steel on steel, Asgill's sword flew from his hand, and at the same instant — or so nearly at the same instant that the disarming and the thrust might have seemed to an untrained eye one motion — Payton turned his wrist and his sword buried itself in Asgill's body. The unfortunate man recoiled with a gasping cry, staggered, and sank sideways to the ground.

"By the powers," O'Beirne exclaimed, springing forward, "a foul stroke! By heaven, a foul stroke! He was disarmed. It——"

"Have a care what you say!" Payton answered slowly, and in a terrible tone. "You 'd do better to look to your friend — for he 'll need it."

"It 's you that struck him after he was disarmed!" Morty cried, almost weeping with rage. "Not a bit of a chance did you give him! You ——"

"Silence, I say!" Payton answered, in a fierce tone of authority. "I know my duty; and if you know yours you 'll look to him."

He turned aside with that, and thrust the point of his sword twice and thrice into the sod before he sheathed the weapon. Meanwhile Morty had cast himself down beside the fallen man, who, speechless, and with his head hanging, continued to support himself on his hand. A patch of blood, bright-coloured, was growing slowly on his vest , and there was blood on his lips.

"Oh, whirra, whirra, what 'll I do?" the Irishman exclaimed, helplessly wringing his hands. "What 'll I do for him? He 's murdered entirely!"

Payton, aided by one of the troopers, was putting on his coat and vest. He paused to bid the other help the gentleman. Then, with a cold look at the fallen man, for whom, though they had been friends, as friends go in the world, he seemed to have no feeling except one of contempt, he walked away in the direction of the rear of the house.

By the time he reached the back door the alarm was abroad, the maids were running to and fro and screaming, and on the threshold he encountered Flavia. Pale as the stricken man, she looked on Payton with an eye of horror, and, as he stood aside to let her pass, she drew her skirts away, that they might not touch him.

He went on, with rage in his heart. "Very good, my lady," he muttered, "very good! But I 've not done with you yet. I know a way to pull your pride down. And I 'll go about it!"

He might have spoken less confidently had he, before he retired from the scene of the fight, cast one upward glance in the direction of the house; had he marked an opening high up in the wall of yew, and noticed through that opening a window, so placed that it alone of all the windows in the house commanded the scene of action. For then he would have discovered at that casement a face he knew, and a pair of stern eyes that had followed the course of the struggle throughout, noted each separate attack, and judged the issue — and the man.

And he might have taken warning.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PITCHER AT THE WELL

THE surgeon of that day was better skilled in letting blood than in stanching it. It was well for Luke Asgill, therefore, that none lived nearer than Tralee. It was still more fortunate for him that there was one in the house to whom the treatment of such a wound as his was an every-day matter, and who was guided in his practice less by the rules of the faculty than by those of common sense.

Even under his care Asgill's life hung for many hours in the balance. There was a time when his breath, in the old phrase, would not raise a feather. The servants were ready to raise the "keen," the cook sought the salt for the death-plate. Colonel John, mindful of many a man found living on the field hours after he should, by all the rules, have died, did not despair; and little by little the Colonel's skill and patience prevailed. The breathing grew stronger and, though the end must remain uncertain, death, for the moment, was repelled.

Now, he who, when others are distraught and wring their hands, knows both what to do and how to do it, cannot fail to impress the imagination. Unsupported by Flavia, Colonel John might have done less: yet she who fetched and carried for him, and shrank from no sight of blood or wound, was also the one who succumbed the most completely to his ascendancy. Flavia's feelings toward her cousin had been altering hour by hour, and this experience of him hastened her tacit surrender.

Having seen how high he could rise in adversity, she now saw also how naturally he took the lead of others, how completely he dominated the crowd. While she no longer marvelled at the skill with which he had thwarted plans which she began to appraise at their value, she found herself relying upon him to an extent which startled and frightened her.

Was it only that morning that she had trembled for her brother's life? Was it only that morning that she had opened her eyes and known him craven, unworthy of his name and race? Was it only that morning that she had sent into peril the man who lay dying before her? For if that were so why did she now feel so different? Why did she now feel inexplicably relieved, inconceivably at ease, almost happy? Why, with the man whom she had thrust into peril lying *in extremis* before her, did she find her mind straying to another? To one whose hands touched hers in the work of tendance, who, low-toned, ordered her hither and thither, and was obeyed?

She asked herself the question as she sat in the darkened room, watching. And in the twilight she blushed. Once, at a crisis, Colonel John had taken her roughly by the wrist and forced her to hold the bandage so, while he twisted it. She looked at the wrist now, and, fancying she could see the imprint of his fingers on it, she blushed more deeply.

Presently there came, as they sat listening to the fluttering breath, a low scratching at the door. At a sign from Colonel Sullivan, who sat on the inner side of the bed, she stole to it and found Morty O'Beirne on the threshold. He beckoned to her, and, closing the door, she followed him downstairs, to where, in the living-room, she found the other O'Beirne standing sheepishly beside the table.

"It 's not knowing what to do, we are," Morty said.

He did not look at her, nor did his brother. Her heart sank. "What is it?" she asked.

"The fiend 's in the man," Morty replied, tapping with his fingers on the table. "But — it 's you will be telling her, Phelim."

"It 's he that 's not content," Phelim muttered. "The thief of the world!"

"Curse him!" cried his brother.

"Not content?" she echoed. "After what he 's done?" Then the downcast demeanour of the two told the story, and she gasped. "He 's for — fighting my brother?" she whispered.

"He 'll be content with no less," Morty answered, with a groan. "Bad cess to him! And The McMurrough — sure he 's no stomach for it. And whirra, whirra, on that the man says he 'll be telling it in Tralee that he 'd not meet him, and as far as Galway City he 'll cut his comb for him! Ay, bedad, he says that!"

She listened, despairing. The house was quiet, as houses in the country are of an afternoon. Her thoughts were no longer with the injured man, however, but in that other room, where her brother lurked in shameful fear that in a nameless man might have been pardoned, but in him, head of his race, last of his race, never! She came of heroes. To her the strain had descended pure and untainted, and she would rather have seen him dead. The two men before her, she was very sure, would have taken up the glove, unwillingly and perforce, but they would have fought! While her brother, The McMurrough —— But even while she thought of it, she saw through the open door the figure of a man saunter slowly past the courtyard gates, his sword under his arm. It was the Englishman. She felt the added sting. Her cheek, that had been pale, burned darkly.

"St. Patrick fly away with the toad and the ugly smile of him!" Morty said. "I 'm thinking it 's between the two of us, Phelim, my jewel! And he that 's killed will help the other."

"Heaven forbid!" Flavia cried, pale with horror at the thought. "Not another!"

"But sure, and I 'm not seeing how else we 'll be rid of him handsomely," Phelim replied.

"No!" she repeated firmly. "No! I forbid it!"

Again the man sauntered by the entrance, and again he cast the same insolent, smiling look at the house. They watched him pass, an ominous shadow in the sunshine, and Flavia shuddered.

"But what will you be doing, then?" Morty asked, rubbing his chin in perplexity. "He 's saying that if The McMurrough 'll not meet him by four o'clock, and it is n't short of it, he 'll be riding this day! And him once gone he 's a bitter tongue, and 't will be foul shame on the house!"

Flavia drew in her breath sharply — she had made up her mind. "I know what I will do," she said. "I will tell him all." And she turned to go.

"It 's not worth the shoe-leather!" Morty cried after her, letting his scorn of James be seen.

But when she returned a minute later she was followed, not by James McMurrough, but by Colonel Sullivan. The Colonel's face had lost the brown of health; but he trod firmly, and his eyes were clear and kind.

"I am willing to help if I can," he said. "What is your trouble?"

"Tell him," Flavia said, averting her face.

They told him in almost the same words in which they had broken the news to her. "And the curse of Cromwell on me, but he 's parading up and down now," Morty continued, "and cocking his eye at the sundial whenever he passes, as much as to say, 'Is it coming, you are?' till the heart 's fairly melted in me with the rage!"

"And it 's shame on us we let him be!" cried Phelim.

Colonel John did not answer. He was silent even when, under the eyes of all, the ominous shadow passed again before the entrance gates — came and went. He was so long silent that Flavia turned to him, and held out her hands. "What shall we do?" she cried — and in that cry she betrayed her new dependence on him.

"It is hard to say," Colonel John answered gravely. His face was very gloomy, and to hide it or his thoughts he turned from them and went to one of the windows.

They waited, Flavia with a growing sense of disappointment. She did not know what she had thought that he would do; but she had been confident that he could help; and it seemed that he could do no more than others.

He came back to them presently, his face sad. "I will deal with it," he said — and he sighed. "You can leave it to me. Do you," he continued, addressing Morty, "come with me, Mr. O'Beirne."

He was for leaving them with that, but Flavia put herself between him and the door. She fixed her eyes on his face. "What are you going to do?" she asked in a low voice.

"I will tell you all — later," he replied gently.

"No! now," she retorted, controlling herself with difficulty. "Now! You are not going — to fight him?"

"I am not going to fight," he answered slowly.

But her heart was not so easily deceived as her ear. "There is something under your words," she said. "What is it?"

"I am not going to fight," he replied gravely, "but to punish. There is a limit." Even while he spoke she remembered in what circumstances those words had been used. "He has the blood of four on his head, and another lies at death's door. And he is not satisfied. Once I warned him. To-day the time for warning is past, the hour for judgment is come. God forgive me if I err, for vengeance is His and it is terrible to be His hand." He turned to Phelim. "My sword is broken," he said. "Fetch me the man's sword who lies upstairs."

Phelim went, awe-stricken, and marvelling. Morty remained, marvelling also. And Flavia — but, as she tried to speak, Payton's shadow came into sight at the entrance gates and went slowly by, and she clapped her hand to her mouth that she might not scream. Colonel Sullivan saw the action, understood, and touched her softly on the shoulder. "Pray," he said, "pray!"

"For you!" she cried in a voice that, to those who had ears, betrayed her heart. "Ah, I will pray!"

"No, for him," he replied. "For him now. For me when I return."

She dropped on her knees before a chair, and, shuddering, hid her face in her hands. And almost at once she knew that they were gone, and that she was alone in the room.

Then, whether she prayed most or listened most, or the very intensity of her listening was itself prayer, she never knew; but only that, when in the agony of her suspense she raised her head from the chair to hear if there was news, the common sounds of afternoon life lashed her with a dreadful irony. The low whirr of a spinning-wheel, a girl's distant chatter, the cluck of a hen in the courtyard, the satisfied grunt of a roving pig, all bore home to her the bitter message that, whatever happened, and though nightfall found her lonely in a dishonoured home, life would proceed as usual, the men and the women about her would eat and drink, and the smallest things would stand where they stood now.

What was that? Only the fall of a spit in the kitchen. Would they never come? Would she never know? That surely was something. They were returning! In a moment she would know. She rose to her feet and stared with stony eyes at the door. But when she had listened long — it was nothing. Nothing! And then — ah, that surely was something! They were coming now. In a moment she would know. Yes, they were coming. In a moment she would know. She pressed her hands to her breast.

She might have known already, for, had she gone to the door, she would have seen who came. But she could not go.

And he, when he came in, did not look at her. He walked from the threshold to the hearth, and — strange coincidence — he set the unsheathed blade he carried in the self-same angle, beside the fire-back, from which she had once taken a sword to attempt his life. And still he did not look at her, but stood with bowed head.

At last he turned. "God forgive us all," he said.

She broke into wild weeping. And what her lips, babbling incoherent thanksgiving, did not tell him, the clinging of her arms, as she hung on him, conveyed.

CHAPTER XXV

PEACE

UNCLE ULICK, with the mud of the road on his boots, and the curls still stiff in the wig which the town barber at Mallow had dressed for him, rubbed his chin with his hand and owned himself puzzled. Had his absence run into months instead of weeks the lapse of time had not sufficed to explain the change which he felt, but could not define, in his surroundings.

Certainly old Darby looked a thought more trim, and the room a trifle better ordered than he had left them. But the change did not stop there — perhaps did not begin there. Full of news of the outer world as he was, he caught himself pausing in mid-career to question himself, and his eyes scanned his companions' faces for the answer his mind refused to give.

An insolent Englishman had come, and, after running Luke Asgill through the body, had paid the penalty — in fight so fair that the very troopers who had witnessed it could make no complaint nor raise trouble. So much Uncle Ulick had learned. But he had not known Payton, and, exciting as the episode sounded, it did not explain the difference in the atmosphere of the house. Where he had left suspicion, and a silent table, he found smiles, and easiness, and a cheerful sense of well-being.

Again he looked about him. "And where will James be?" he asked.

"He has left us," Flavia said, with her eyes on Colonel Sullivan.

"It 's away to Galway City he is," Morty O'Beirne explained with a chuckle.

"The saints be between us and harm!" Uncle Ulick exclaimed in astonishment. "And why 's he there?"

"The story is long," said Colonel Sullivan.

"But I can tell it in a few words," Flavia continued with dignity. "And the sooner it is told the better. He has not behaved well, Uncle Ulick. And at his request and with — the legal owner's consent — it 's I have agreed to pay him one-half of the value of the property."

"The deuce you have!" Uncle Ulick exclaimed, in greater astonishment. And, pushing back his seat and rubbing his huge thigh with his hand, he looked from one to another. "By the powers! if I may take the liberty of saying so, young lady, you 've done a vast deal in a very little time — faith, in no time at all, at all!" he added.

"It was done at his request," Flavia answered, gravely.

Uncle Ulick continued to rub his thigh and to stare. These things were very surprising. "And they 're telling me," he said, "that Luke Asgill's in bed upstairs?"

"He is."

"And recovering?"

"He is, glory be!"

"Nor that same's not the best news of him," Morty said with a grin. "Nor the last."

"True for you!" Phelim cried, "if it was the last word you spoke!"

"What are you meaning?" Uncle Ulick asked.

"He 's turned," said Morty. "No less! Turned! He 's what his father was before him, Mr. Sullivan — come back to Holy Church, and not a morning but Father O'Hara's with him."

"Turned!" Uncle Ulick cried. "Luke Asgill, the justice? Boys, you 've making fun of me!" And, unable to believe what the O'Beirnes told him, he looked to Flavia for confirmation.

"It is true," she said.

"Bedad, it is?" Uncle Ulick replied. "Then I 'll not be surprised in all my life again! More by token, there 's only one thing left to hope for, my jewel, and that 's certain. Cannot you do the same to the man that 's beside you?"

Flavia glanced quickly at Colonel John, then, with a heightened colour, she looked again at Uncle Ulick. "That 's what I cannot do," she said.

But the blush, and the smile that accompanied it, and something perhaps in the way she hung toward her neighbour as she turned to him, told Uncle Ulick all. The big man smacked the table with his hand till the platters leaped from the board.

"Holy poker!" he cried, "is it that you 're meaning? And I felt it, and I did n't feel it, and you sitting there forenent me, and prating as if butter would n't melt in your mouth! It is so, is it? But there, the red of your cheek is answer enough!"

For Flavia was blushing more brightly than before, and Colonel John was smiling, and the two young men were laughing openly.

"You must get Flavia alone," Colonel John said, "and perhaps she 'll tell you."

"Bedad, it 's true, and I felt it in the air," Ulick Sullivan answered, smiling all over his face. "Ho, ho! Ho, ho! Indeed you 've not been idle while I 've been away. But what does Father O'Hara say, eh?"

"The Father ——" Flavia began in a small voice.

"Ay, what does the Father say?"

"He says," Flavia continued, looking down demurely, "that it 's a rare stick that 's no bend in it, and — and 't is very little use looking for it on a dark night. Besides, he ——" she glanced at her neighbour, "he said he 'd be master, you know, and what could I do?"

"Then it 's the very wrong way he 's gone about it!" Uncle Ulick cried, with a chuckle. "For there 's no married man that I know that 's master! It 's you, my jewel, have put the comether on him, and I 'll trust you to keep it there!"

But into that we need not go. Our task is done. Whether Flavia's high spirit and her husband's gravity travelled the road together in unbroken amity, or with no more than the jars which the accidents of life occasion, it does not fall within this story to tell. Probably the two had their bickerings which did not sever love. But one thing may be taken for granted: in that part of Kerry the King over the Water, if his health was sometimes drunk of an evening, stirred up no second trouble. Nor, when the '45 convulsed Scotland, and shook England to its centre, did one man at Morristown raise his hand or lose his life. For so much at least that windswept corner of Kerry, beaten year in and year out by the Atlantic rollers, had to thank Colonel Sullivan.

Nor for that only. In many unnamed ways his knowledge of the world blessed those about him. And, above all, his neighbours owned the influence of one who, with a reputation gained at the sword's point, stood resolutely, at fairs and cockfights as on his own hearth, for peace. More than a century was to elapse before private war ceased to be the amusement of the Irish gentry. But in that part of Kerry, and during a score of years, the name and weight of Colonel Sullivan of Morristown availed to quiet many a brawl and avert many a meeting.

To follow the mean of spirit beyond the point where their fortunes cease to be entwined with those of better men is a profitless task. James McMurrough, found wanting where all favoured him, was not likely to rise above his nature where the odds were equal and all men his rivals. What he did in Galway City, how long he tarried there, and whither he went afterward, in the vain search for a place where a man could swagger without courage and ruffle it without consequences, it matters not to inquire.

Luke Asgill, who could rise as much above The McMurrough as he could fall below him, was redeemed, one may believe, by the good that lurked in him. He lay many weeks on a sick-bed, and returned to every-day life another man. For, whereas he had succumbed a passionate lover of Flavia, he rose wholly cured of that passion. It had ebbed from him with his blood, or waned with his fever. And where as he had before sought both gain and power, restrained by as few scruples as the worst men of a bad age, he rose a pursuer of both, but within bounds. Close-fisted, at Father O'Hara's instance he could open his hand. Hard, at the Father's prayer he would at times remit a rent or extend a bond. Ambitious, he gave up, for his soul's sake, the office which endowed him with power to oppress.

There were some who scoffed behind his back, but in truth, as far as the man's reformation went, it was real. The hours he had passed in the presence of death, the thoughts he had had while life was low in him, were not forgotten in his health. The strong nature, slow to take an impression, was stiff to retain it. A moody, silent man, going about his business with a face to match the sullen bogs of his native land, paid one tribute only to the woman he had loved and forgotten — he died a bachelor.

DATE DUE

THE KING'S LIBRARY
3000113843